



THE
GARDEN
OF
LIES

JUSTUS
MILES
FORMAN



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The Garden of Lies



THE
GARDEN OF LIES

A ROMANCE

By JUSTIS MILES FORMAN

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"Cupid's House Party," etc.

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY
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To F. W. F.

*This tale of a brave and faithful gentleman
is dedicated to the faithfulest gentleman
I have ever known.*

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The Garden of Lies

CHAPTER I

TO maintain that a man's character is determined for good or ill by the circumstances chance throws in his way, by the gay or sorry tricks fate plays him, has ever seemed to me a folly. Yet so von Altdorf maintained most strenuously as we sat, last evening and late into the night, on the terrasse of one of those thronged and gayly lighted cafés along the old Boulevard St. Michel—"La Source" it was—and talked of the great game that we had tried to play, long since, and of how the game was taken out of our hands by greater hands and played to so strange an end.

"Else why," demanded von Altdorf pursuing his argument, "why did Denis Mallory happen into the Café d'Alençon on that particular evening of all evenings? Why did he not pass by and—end his days in the grave of a drunkard and blackguard? How else did he grow into a nobility and greatness that shamed us all, but by force of the circumstances

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into which he fell in those following weeks? Answer me that."

"He was led," said I firmly, "into the café, that night, by something greater than chance, my friend, something beyond our philosophy. And he was given us to do our work by no mere happening. Moreover, if circumstances make a man, why then didn't Denis Mallory prove, later on, a greater blackguard than one likes to think—later, when circumstances made it possible for him and chance made it easy? Answer me that."

But von Altdorf shook his grey head and frowned out into the bustle and hurry of the Boulevard where the fiacres dashed up and down loaded with students and cocottes, and a steam tram panted noisily up the hill.

It was the first time we had met since those days two years ago—two years did I say? By my faith it seems but two weeks. I can see their faces, hear their voices, those players of a great game, Mr. Mallory's and Sir Gavin's and von Altdorf's and the Prince's, and perhaps more vividly, more intimately than all, the face and voice of the unhappy lady whose fate had seemed to lie in our hands.

It was our first meeting and we had much to say to each other. Von Altdorf had come on to Paris from Vienna on a private mission of the Emperor whom he now serves, and I had run across from London to meet him.

It pleased our whim, once dinner was over, to

cross the river to the old quarter again, to revisit the gay Boulevard with its trees and its cafés and its throngs of grotesquely garbed students. It changes little as time goes.

It was good to see him, to clasp his hand once more, to talk long and fully of those matters that neither of us may ever forget, but I am not altogether sure that I am glad we met. There was a difference, a certain something of restraint, a failure to see things quite from the same view-point. Von Altdorf's mind was full of his present business, of the secrets and policies of the Court of Vienna. The present and the future pressed insistently upon him, and he turned with a certain effort, a stiffness, to look backward.

As for me, why I suppose I was most keenly occupied with my own little affairs and my own future. The two years had carried us apart, filmed the windows of memory, deadened ever so slightly the keenness of those passions that once were all our life.

And so it has occurred to me since I bade farewell to von Altdorf and saw him off again to his work in the East, to set down as faithfully as I may, while yet my memory is fresh and strong, the story of the man who won our love and admiration against such odds, and beside whom all other men seem to me dwarfed and petty.

There can be no harm in writing of these matters now. Denis Mallory is very far away beyond the

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stir and murmur of this western world of ours, and She is far away too. MacKenzie is back in London. He has an office in Harley Street where you may consult him at certain hours—for a certain number of guineas. I see him now and then but we never talk of Paris. Von Altdorf is, as I have said, busied in Vienna, and the Prince is with his fathers—God rest his soul!

To no one beyond these few could the telling of my tale be of consequence. The things that stirred us all so deeply never reached the great public, though heaven knows they came near enough to reaching it. The very realm over which we plotted and schemed and fought has been quietly erased from the map of Europe by that swift and noiseless hand outstretched from the white throne in the North, which will, some day, as quietly, erase the names of all the remaining little states that we call the Balkans and of whose inner history we know so little.

But let me come to my tale without further parley, save in the matter of this. In what I shall tell there must be, perforce, much which I did not personally see or hear. Such things I have gained in part from those others who knew directly of them, partly from my knowledge of what such a one would do or say when so placed. I must put myself in the position of the writer of fanciful tales, who pretends to see what is in the minds and hearts of the puppets his hand dangles. All this for a

greater smoothness in the telling and a wider scope of view to him who reads.

.

I mind that I had been dining that spring evening over on the proper side of the river in the Avenue Kléber, and that it was somewhere near eleven o'clock when my fiacre, homeward bound, rolled smoothly up the long straight reach of the rue de Rennes.

I have said that it was spring. There was a soft warm little breeze that bore down the street and pressed against my face. There were odours abroad, the night was full of them, the scent of green things waking to life, of the little sticky chestnut buds that were just pushing out from branch and twig—they would be great cones of fragrant blossoms in a fortnight; of starting leaves and quickened sod; and everywhere the heavy fragrance of lilacs newly in flower. It stirred the blood, sent it mounting like wine to one's head, set one's heart to jumping, filled one with a vague unrest.

"The world's too tame," said I, taking a long breath and throwing out my arms. "There's no romance left in it—not even here in romantic Paris. Who could be romantic in an opera hat and a dress coat? One needs silk breeches and shoe-buckles and a wig and a sword." I raised my stick and regarded it with disfavour. "Fancy carrying about a silly little bit of wood like that!" said I morosely.

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"What's the good of it? It's not even ornamental, and I've no impediment in my gait.—Romance is dead. I'd like to fight a duel or—or overthrow a kingdom or run off with somebody's beautiful bride who had fallen in love with me at sight, but I can't, just because it's the nineteenth century and because this thing's a stick and not a sword." And I shook the cane again disgustedly.

"It's not fair," I complained to the night at large. "It's not fair to stir up a chap so, to put the spring in his blood—all those lilacs and—and things, if you're not going to give him some little outlet. Jove, what air! It's atmospheric poetry.

"Cocher!" said I. The cocher pulled up.

"Je m'ennui de ce monde ci, Cocher," I explained.

"There's nothing of romantic in it—except me. There is nothing of—poetical, of—of *je ne sais quoi*. Can you take me somewhere where I can find romance?"

The cocher smiled affably and made a beautiful gesture with both hands and his two eyes, a gesture that seemed to say, "But find Monsieur a romance? *nom d'un chien!* It is of an unbelievable easiness. Leave everything to me." He was a funny little man, pot-bellied, red of nose and scanty grey of hair. He had no teeth to speak of.

"Monsieur would be thinking of the Boulevard St. Michel?" he suggested with confidence.

"No," said I firmly, "Monsieur would be thinking

of no such thing. The Boul' Miche' is not in the least romantic, and you know it. It's only absurd and squalid and mercenary. Romantic? Great Heaven! Here, set me down at a café, any old café, the d'Alençon. I tell you there's no more romance ici bas."

I got down sadly at the Café d'Alençon in the Place de Rennes. The dial high over the big façade of the Gare Montparnasse said eleven fifteen. The terrasse of the café, brilliant under its sputtering lights, was nearly full, and M. Thuriot, fat, smiling, comfortable, beamed a presiding deity from the background. He said that M. Livingstone and M. Rogers had been in earlier, and had gone, but that there were deux ou trois Anglais still within; for example the grand Monsieur who had come with Monsieur hier soir, Mac-Mac—quelque chose.

"Ah," said I, "MacKenzie! Sir Gavin MacKenzie." But certainly, M. MacKenzie, together with another étranger, non, pas Anglais, Italien peut être, Autrichien, one would have a certain difficulty in saying.

I went inside, made my bow to Madame the Dame du Comptoir, exalted upon her throne, and looked about the room.

There were few at the little tables, nearly every one had chosen the soft scented air outside under the awning, but Sir Gavin was sitting over in the far corner behind a glass of whiskey and water.

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No French concoctions for MacKenzie. And with him was the other *étranger*, *Italien peut être*, *Autrichien*, one would have a certain difficulty in saying.

"No, not Italian," said I to myself, "Austrian, possibly. Yes, one would have a certain difficulty in saying. He would be about forty, from appearances, though his head and MacKenzie's were of an equal greyness, and MacKenzie was a good fifty or more. But the other man's skin looked younger than his hair would warrant. There were none of the creases that age furrows in the neck, under the ears, or across the forehead or in the cheeks. To be sure his face was lined strongly, but with vicissitude, one would say, not years. He had great dark eyes under extraordinarily bushy and prominent brows, and the skin under and about them was dark. He had a jutting nose strong and hawk-like, and a mouth that shut to a firm hard line over a jaw which said danger. His cheeks were lean, hollowed a bit under the bone, and across one there was a sabre scar. He wore a small grizzled moustache, and his hair, grey as I have said, was scant above the temples. He would not be above medium height but he had a most singular breadth of shoulders. He made a curious contrast to MacKenzie's square Scotch bulk and professional closely cropped mutton chop whisker.

I hesitated a moment over joining the two in their corner, but turned away with a little laugh

upon receiving from Sir Gavin a curt and most ungenial nod.

"MacKenzie's something on his mind," said I, settling myself at a table. "He's most unusually glum, and so is the other chap—— Oh anything—I don't care what—Grand Marnier, I think," to the waiter.

I saw MacKenzie speak to his companion who turned and favoured me with the keenest glance of scrutiny I remember ever to have received.

"Oh I'm quite harmless, my friend," said I over my little glass of Grand Marnier, "I would n't hurt a cat and I've committed no crimes that I can recall at the moment."

The two conferred an instant, heads together, and then MacKenzie raised a beckoning finger. I told the waiter to bring over my glass and crossed to the corner.

"Creighton," said the Scotsman, "allow me to present you to Colonel von Altdorf."

The Colonel rose and made a ceremonious little bow, heels together. I tried to look as impressive. Then, when we were seated, no one seemed inclined to say anything. The settled gloom upon the faces of MacKenzie and Colonel von Altdorf remained unlightened—indeed, if anything, it seemed to grow more deep.

"Beautiful evening," said I firmly, after a silence that bade fair to last the night out.

"Yes, yes—shockin'," said MacKenzie absently.

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"But it's all wasted," I grieved with a sigh. "What's the good of spring-time coming, anyhow? Nobody cares any more. It just stirs your blood up a bit, but you don't do anything. I was thinking, on my way up just now, that spring's a mere exasperation. Nobody wants it. There's no more romance in the world."

Colonel von Altdorf gave a short laugh.

"Oh, is n't there?" said he.

I looked from his face to MacKenzie's. There had been a certain significance in the tone.

MacKenzie clinked the bit of ice in his long glass, and frowned down upon it thoughtfully. Then he drew a long breath, and met my eyes.

"Creighton," said he, smiling a little, "you did me a good turn once——"

"Ah," said I, reddening, "as for that, it was n't of any——" but MacKenzie raised his hand.

"An' you did it," he proceeded, "by suggestin' a way out of a deeficulty. I may say a brilliant way," he added. "Have ye your wits about you to-night, man? for there is a deeficulty ready for your solvin' that's too much for my brain—an' too much for von Altdorf's, here, into the bargain, diplomatist though he is."

"Why," said I, "I'm no barrister, and I'm no writer of melodramas either, that I should be able to solve difficulties at the drop of the handkerchief; but what's your trouble, Sir Gavin? At least let's hear it."

MacKenzie shook his head and made a little helpless gesture with his two hands.

"'Tis no trouble o' mine," said he, "that is, in a way o' speakin'. Indirectly it's bound to be a trouble to all of us who 're concerned." He nodded to Colonel von Altdorf.

"Tell him, man," said he.

Von Altdorf rested his elbows upon the edge of the little table, hands clasped among the glasses, and turned his deep set eyes upon mine. When he spoke it was in excellent English but with an accent, a dwelling upon sibilants, an alien value of dentals and gutturals too slight to be reproducible.

"Do you know where Novodnia is, Mr. Creighton?" said he.

"I do," said I. "It's on the lower Danube all mixed up with Roumania and Servia and Bulgaria and the rest. It's the littlest one, is n't it? Poor dear! Russia will gobble it some day."

"Precisely," said Colonel von Altdorf unsmiling. "Precisely! Russia will gobble it some day, but Russia has n't gobbled it yet, my friend. It would perhaps have been better for certain people if she had. Very well, if you know that much you may possibly know that a certain prince of the dominant house in Novodnia has recently, through a most extraordinary and improbable series of deaths, come to the throne."

"Carol III!" said I.

"Precisely," agreed von Altdorf again. "Carol

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III sits upon the seat of his fathers. May he long sit there! But the point is this. I have said that he came to the throne through an extraordinary series of deaths. Indeed so improbable was his succession considered that it was never thought of at all, that he was allowed to marry outside of royal circles."

"The deuce!" said I. "You begin to complicate matters."

"Being without fortune," continued Colonel von Altdorf, "the Prince at last married a young American woman of great beauty, I understand, and of tremendous wealth; his idea being, of course, to establish himself in the state which his rank permitted but his lack of fortune forbade."

"And then," said I. "Why then, no sooner was he married than occurred this improbable series of deaths which brought him to the throne and—face to face with an extremely embarrassing problem."

"You state it," said Colonel von Altdorf, "with brevity and point. His wife being not of royal rank, indeed a commoner, his children by her could not succeed to the throne."

"There remained then," said I, "but one course. The marriage had to be regarded as a morganatic one, and a princess of the proper extraction provided."

Colonel von Altdorf smiled.

"We get on," said he with a little inclination of his head. "But right at this point—if I may con-

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tinue the tale—arose an amazing and most unlooked for obstacle in the path of what might have been considered an embarrassing, but surely not an unsurmountable difficulty. The Prince, if you like, refused point blank either to divorce his wife or to marry again in his own rank.”

“The devil!” said I.

“My sentiments exactly,” observed Colonel von Altdorf.

“But there is more to come if I mistake not?” I protested.

Colonel von Altdorf smiled again.

“It is a matter of gratification to me,” he said, “that you happened into the Café d’Alençon this evening. You have not a slow mind. Yes, there is more to come. Fate, my friend, when she takes it into her head to play a momentous trick, plays it most thoroughly to the end. She’s a good sports-woman, Fate. I’ve seen her play strange games. Aye, and I’ve taken a hand with her at times, but I’ve never seen her yet in so wholly wanton a mood as this.

“The marriage, of which we have been speaking, took place in America, at a watering place not far from New York, I believe, a place called Newport, where the young American woman’s family had a large summer château. The ceremony was, of course, solemnised in a church, at some little distance from the château. But while the newly married pair were being driven from the church to

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a fête which was to follow, the horses attached to the bridal landau took fright at the passing of a motor car and ran away, finally dashing the landau to pieces against an iron column, a street lamp, I understand. The Prince escaped with a few bruises, his wife on the contrary ——”

“Not dead? not dead?” I cried, leaning forward over the little table.

“His wife, on the contrary,” said von Altdorf, “was severely injured—injured as to the head. Her injuries were so severe, in fact,” he continued, turning the little liqueur glass slowly in his hand, and staring down upon it, “that she was still in a condition of unconsciousness and delirium, when a fortnight later the Prince was called home to Novodnia upon the sudden death of his father and brothers by the malignant fever which swept the entire family.”

“And since?” I cried, “since? Get on with it, Colonel! What has happened since?”

“Why,” said Colonel von Altdorf, “the most extraordinary part of it has happened since. The Prince’s wife, struck down so cruelly, as it were upon the altar steps, recovered from her injuries in a month’s time—bodily.”

“Bodily!” said I in a half whisper, “bodily? why—why you do n’t mean she’s ——”

“The blow being upon the head,” continued von Altdorf, “has in some manner—for information upon which I must refer you to our friend the

physician here—so acted upon her brain, that, upon her bodily recovery, it was found she had completely lost her memory of recent events, of any event, indeed, later in occurrence than a year back.”

“Good God!” I cried. “Then she did n’t know she had been married? She did n’t remember the Prince at all?”

“The unfortunate lady had, alas, no recollection whatever of anything connected with her marriage or her acquaintance with the Prince. She would not know him if she were to meet him face to face.

“Of course she was told of her marriage, that had to be done, though at the expense of a great nervous shock, but, as she grew no better, the family deemed it the wisest plan to bring her to Europe, to place her, in short, under the personal care of the greatest alienist living. They brought her to Sir Gavin here, and Sir Gavin is devoting his exclusive attention to her treatment.”

“What, here?” said I, “here in Paris?”

“Where else?” demanded Colonel von Altdorf.

Now MacKenzie had, as I knew, taken, six months before, that great triangle of garden which is comprised between the Boulevard Raspail, the rue Denfert Rochereau and the little impasse called the rue Boissonade. The triangle extends, from its base along the rue Boissonade, nearly to the Place du Lion de Belfort, and belonged, at one time, to a

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convent of importance, whose quaint mediæval buildings, set near the point of the triangle, and opening upon the rue Denfert Rochereau, MacKenzie had made habitable and refurnished with some comfort. As for the garden, high walled from the streets, there is no finer in old Paris.

It was here then that the unfortunate lady must be living, a scant half mile from where we sat in the Café d'Alençon.

"And she's better?" I asked. "She'll recover?"

MacKenzie dropped a fist upon the little table and the glasses jumped and rattled.

"She's no better," said he, "nor will be if I know my trade. There are things too secret for human skill, man, things that lie on the gods' knees and must ever be so. The poor lady will never have back her year of memory unless it be by some miracle that's beyond our own ken. But just now we are brought face to face with a new problem. The lady, so soon as she was informed of her marriage, began to express a most lively interest in her unknown husband, an interest which has grown—she is still in a nervous state, too delicate to be trifled with, ye'll understand—to such a degree that we're at our wits' end. She fancies—poor body—that we're in a league to keep him from her, and won't understand why he can't be produced. She's rapidly working herself to the point o' dementia again, an' unless something can be done

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within the next few days I'll not answer for consequences."

"And he?" said I, "the Prince? He's là bas, I suppose, in Novodnia?"

"Aye," said von Altdorf. "He's at home where he can't be spared, struggling to keep the throne of his fathers under his body, and to prevent those pestilent Pavelovitches from sitting in his seat, as they'd give their souls to do, curse them!"

"Ah!" said I. "There's another dynasty weary for a throne to sit upon? Pavelovitch? I seem to recollect the name."

"They're the Russian party," growled von Altdorf. "And may the devil take his own! There'd be no independence in Novodnia with a Pavelovitch on the throne. God knows there's little enough anyhow. No, Prince Karl must n't leave the country now, it would be next to fatal. Yet, alas, if he does n't leave it must be next to fatal to the loveliest lady alive—God pity her! It's a nation against a woman. Mr. Creighton, they say you're good at riddles, read me this one. It's too deep for such as I."

I shook my head.

"Dites donc, garçon!" said I. "Another Grand Marnier. And for M. le Docteur another whiskey à l'eau, and for M. le Colonel a grog Americain. Alas, Colonel, I'm no reader of riddles. The Prince, you say, can't come to Paris?"

"He must n't," declared von Altdorf frowning.

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"God knows he would if he could. I'm in daily terror of his turning up, malgré tout, such terror that I've taken pains to make him a virtual prisoner, là bas. No, the Prince can't come."

"And the Prin—and Madame," said I, "has no memory of the Prince, would not know him from—from me, for example?"

"Why no," agreed von Altdorf watching me curiously, "no, she would n't know him from you, man, or me. What then, my riddle reader?"

"Then," I cried, "it would seem to me, gentlemen, that the only thing to do—minding always that Madame's reason is at stake, perhaps her very life, and that desperate situations demand desperate remedies—it would seem to me that the only thing to do is—to create a temporary Prince here in Paris—wait, wait! only, of course, till Madame is so restored in health and mental equilibrium that she can bear to be told the truth, gently, very gently, and prepared for what is before her."

"Great God!" said von Altdorf softly, and stared at me, wide-eyed. The glass of steaming grog that he held beat a sort of tattoo upon the marble top of the little table. "Great God!" said he again.

Sir Gavin MacKenzie had been striking a match to light the great black meerschaum that hung from his mouth. The match flared and twisted and burned down till it scorched his unheeding fingers, but Sir Gavin's eyes were upon my face, narrowed a bit, very steady, and Sir Gavin's brows were

gathered into a knot over his nose. I think that none of us spoke for several minutes, but each stared at the others weighing the thing in mind, counting the gain and loss.

"I'm no sure but ye have it, man," said the alienist at last. He spoke in a half whisper and his eyes questioned Colonel von Altdorf. He had quite forgotten the unlighted pipe.

Von Altdorf drank half his long glass of steaming grog. The glass clicked against his teeth.

"Aye," said he gruffly, "very clever and very bold, but who's to do it? It's no easy task, mind you."

MacKenzie leaned forward.

"Now there's you," he suggested persuasively. "Me she knows, of course, but there's you. You'd know all the tricks too."

"Not for a crown in heaven!" cried the other. "I've been a diplomatist all my life, and it's likely I've no character left me, but I want to die a comparatively honest man.—Not for a crown in heaven, my friend."

"Or you," said MacKenzie turning to me. "'Tis your plan, do you play it out."

"Not I," I declared with some vigour. "I'll make you schemes if you like, but I'll play no blackguard for you or any one else, MacKenzie."

"And there we are," mourned the Scotsman. "'Tis the only possible way, rash and desperate though it be, an' there's no one to play the part.

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A gentleman—in a manner o' speakin'—we must have, but no gentleman would do the thing. A rascal will never serve our use. Man, why need ye spoil our peace o' mind with your mad schemes? I shall be thinkin' o' nothing else."

And we sat all three shaking our heads most ruefully, for in truth there seemed no way out of the impasse.

CHAPTER II

THERE came a chorus of shouts and laughter from the loungers upon the terrasse without, a snatch of maudlin song in a voice I seemed to know, and a very tall young man broke into the room, tacking like a yacht in a heavy sea, and hove to with a sudden lurch before the throne of the majestic Dame du Comptoir that faced the door.

"Beautiful lady," cried the young man gazing passionately up into the alarmed countenance of the patronne, and making a theatrical gesture of hand to heart, "beautiful lady be not 'f-fraid! 'S' only—me! Light that 'tracts moths 'n' lil' bugs t' flutter round it, 'traced me way from Boulevard St. G'main—— Could n' stop 'way f'm you." And he swept her a bow that nearly dragged his black curls in the dust of the floor, the very caricature of a bow, such as one might see upon a music-hall stage or in a farce comedy.

"Oh—oh—oh fair, oh sweet,"

said he tearfully.

"When I do l-look on thee,
In whom all joys so well agree,
Heart 'n' soul do sing in me."

Upon my word the rascal might have made his

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fortune on the stage. He had a voice of a quality of a resonance, of a timbre! A voice to ring tenderness from a plaster cast.

I have said that he was a very tall young man. He had a singularly lithe, supple figure, slender at waist and hips but very broad in the shoulders. He might have been a 'varsity oarsman. He wore no beard or moustache but the hair upon his head was black and waving, almost curly, and random locks of it fell down over his forehead nearly to the straight brows. He had a pair of merry, grey eyes, deep set, and a mouth that seemed to have been forced into a sternness of line unnatural to it, despite the firm square jaw beneath. His smile was the smile of a child—I have never known any one who could resist it—but about his eyes were circles and lines of ill living that never would be wholly erased. He looked a strange mixture of opposites, of warring elements, this drunken young reprobate with the thrilling voice who pressed his heart under his two hands, and quoted the late Sir Philip Sydney to a buxom and perturbed French woman who could n't understand.

"Mais tenez, tenez!" cried the patronne at last, laughing and holding her ears. "Allez vous en, M. Mallory! Vous m'embarrasez."

The tall young man turned away with a gloomy wave of the hand and gazed abstractedly down the room. He caught my eye for a moment and bowed with an impressive dignity.

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“Drunken swine!” growled MacKenzie. “Who is he?”

“Why,” said I, looking after the tall young man who had seated himself at one of the little tables by the opposite wall, “why he’s a queer lot, a most uncommon queer lot. His name is Mallory, Denis Mallory, and he comes, I’m told, of a very good family indeed somewhere in Ulster—— He’s Irish of course—— He was a Sub. in a Cavalry regiment at one time, but he got himself into some sort of a scrape, ran up debts that his governor could n’t or would n’t pay off, and he had to sell out. I fancy it broke him up a good bit, made him lose his grip, for he’s been a pretty fairly hard lot ever since. That happened five or six years ago. He’s been the approved type of soldier of fortune for the most part—the sort you read about in the story books. He’s fought from Venezuela to South Africa and from the Sudan to China. There’s no doubt that he’s a good soldier, and I greatly fear there’s little doubt that he’s a good nothing else. Yes, he’s the approved type of Chevalier d’Industrie, such as you read of, with the difference that he’s no better off for his adventures. The story book heroes have always a breast covered with medals, and a fortune amassed. Poor Mallory has neither. I suppose there’s no man in Paris to-day who has fought in more little wars, braved more diverse dangers—or made love to more women, and yet he’s what you see over there, a

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dissolute young reprobate with the soul of a poet, the tongue of an angel, the record of a César de Bazan, and seldom a franc to bless himself with. He ekes out a hand to mouth existence, I'm told, by writing sketches for some London journal. Aye, aye, he's a queer lot, a most uncommon queer lot! Every one knows him here, and every one despises him, and yet—why curiously enough, every one has a sneaking fondness for him too. He's a rogue if you like, but a debonair rogue, it can't be denied. Moreover, he's not a scoundrel, you'll understand, dissipated though he be. He's still, in a way, a gentleman. No one ever knew him to lie or take an unfair advantage."

MacKenzie shook a heavy head.

"A wasted life," said he. "A man o' parts to wreck himself for the love o' excitement an' drink. 'T is a sad case."

Colonel von Altdorf was leaning forward, elbows upon the little table among the glasses, and fingers absently stroking his grizzled moustache. There was a curious expression upon his face—a most curious expression. His eyes, narrowed a bit, were upon young Denis Mallory across the room.

All at once his thought burst upon my mind. It was as if he had spoken it by word. I met his eyes excitedly, and for an instant the thing seemed possible.

"Our man," said von Altdorf quietly.

"Ah, no, no!" I cried. "He—he would n't do

it. Why, man, it's almost a blackguard's trick, imposing upon a helpless woman so. I've told you that he's still in a way a gentleman. He'd never play a trick upon a woman. No, no, it's out of the question. I was mad to suggest such a scheme, it could n't be done—Mallory would n't do it anyhow."

"It's got to be done," said Colonel von Altdorf from between closed teeth. "I tell you we're in a desperate way. It's playing a trick upon a woman to save her reason. You do n't appreciate the state she's in. It's a desperate game but it's the only one to be played, and your young adventurer yonder is the man to play it. After all it's no such blackguardly thing, and what responsibility there is will be shared amongst us all. If he plays the part it's we who lead him to it. And the lady shall be told the truth so soon as she's able to bear it."

I took a long breath.

"It's not to my liking," said I, but I caught young Mallory's eye across the room, and raised a beckoning hand.

He came over to our table a bit unsteadily, tacking as before, like a yacht in a heavy sea, and stood with a hand upon the back of a chair, smiling down upon us all, the cheery, confidential smile of intoxication—save that with him it had a certain personal quality, a magnetism, a sort of sweetness.

"Mallory," said I, "I want to present you to Sir Gavin MacKenzie, and to Colonel von Altdorf of the Novodnian service." Young Mallory bowed

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easily to Sir Gavin and saluted von Altdorf with an instinctive drawing up, a stiffening into military carriage. Then he lurched into a chair and smiled again.

"A congress o' n-nations, gentlemen," said he. "A c-conference o' the Powers. 'Pon my—my faith you'll not find four races in four men gathered around one table every day. Scotland——" He beamed groggily upon Sir Gavin. "Hoots mon will ye no' dance us a fling?"

MacKenzie stiffened in his chair, but I hacked at his shins under the table and he sank back again.

"England," said young Mallory, and wagged a sorrowful head at me. "Oh, man, had you the sins o' your country upon your head this night, it's heavy you'd be! Novodnia—may she never go to fatten the white bear's belly!" There was a fervent "amen" from von Altdorf. "An' old Ireland, God bless her green shores! What? a drink did you say, Creighton? No man can boast he's heard me cry nay to that call. A little wine for me stomach's sake. Egad, 't is naught else I've had for me stomach's sake since the morning. Hè garcon, make that wine absinthe, Pernod, man, an' look sharp! I'm in need of it."

"Great Heaven, Mallory!" said I, "do you mean to say you've eaten nothing since morning? You're drinking on an empty stomach? Why, it's suicide! Absinthe, too, and in the evening. Here,

garçon, deux sandwiches pour mousier, tout à l'instant !”

He fell upon the sandwiches when they came, most ravenously, huge, thick and unpalatable though they were, and never paused until he had finished them.

The three of us watched him in silence. Then, when he had made an end, he drew himself up with a little sigh of comfort.

“Bad manners, gentlemen,” said he smiling again. He seemed more himself, the food had taken off the edge of his intoxication. “Bad manners, I grant you—but faith, I needed the sandwiches. By some extraordinary mischance I neglected to lunch or dine. I forget the reason—— Ah yes, ’t was a poor little devil of a model out of work, who needed the dinner worse than I. An’ then—why then, what with a pair of absinthes on an empty stomach—or maybe three—I—I went off the hook just a wee bit. It may be that I’m a trifle screwed, just a trifle, but you’ll not mind—’t is an accident, not a habit.”

He caught up the tumbler of opalescent, greenish-yellow liquor that stood at his elbow and smiled upon it fondly.

“My only friend,” said he in that wonderful deep tender voice of his—upon my word he might have been making love speeches to a sweetheart.

“The only friend out o’ them all who’s stood by me, good times and bad. You’ve never failed me

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yet. Gentlemen, I've wandered and I've fought from Carácas to Ladysmith, and from Kartum to Tien Tsin, and I've chummed up with more people than I dare say, but on my faith in Heaven—if I've any left—there's never a man o' them has stuck by me, never a woman but's played me false." He smiled down upon the glinting liquor in the glass.

"To the green devil, gentlemen," he cried, "the green devil who stands by me, fair weather or foul, who slaps me on the shoulder when I'm down on me luck, who takes me by the hand and leads me into paradise when the world's bitterest. To the little green devil who's a great green god—may he ever reign!"

He tilted the glass till there remained but half its charge, and dropped back in his chair with his chin upon his breast.

I leaned over the table and laid a hand upon his arm.

"Mallory," said I, "Mallory!" and shook the arm gently. "Pull together a bit, man, there's work forward. There's a great game afoot, a risky game, Mallory, a desperate game such as you love. It wants a clear head and a ready tongue, aye, and a ready arm too, maybe—in the event of certain contingencies. A bold man's wanted, come, are you with us?"

"My only friend," said young Mallory shaking his head sadly. "The little green devil who's a

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great green god. Aye, a great green god." His voice died away in murmurings, and his eyes saw beyond us, far beyond the Café d'Alençon—into paradise perhaps.

I looked at MacKenzie in despair, but MacKenzie was writing upon the back of a visiting card. He beckoned a waiter.

"The pharmacy at the foot of the Avenue du Maine," said he, "and quickly."

The distance was short, and the man was back in a few moments with a small vial, red labelled. MacKenzie poured a few drops of the liquid into a wine-glass of water. It sent up a keen and pungent odour as of ammonia.

"Drink this," said he, setting the glass before young Mallory. And Mallory drank, his eyes still beyond us, far beyond the Café d'Alençon.

But in a moment the eyes returned, narrowed, frowned a bit. He turned to the Scotsman curiously.

"Why, 't is a queer drink, your liquor, man, uncommon nasty—and I owe you small thanks; you've waked me from a most delightful revery."

He smiled across at me.

"You spoke of a game, Creighton," he said, "a desperate game. I heard all your words but—well the fact is, I was in heaven at the moment, and returning was not to be thought of. A game, my boy? Let's hear it. I'm none so sure but I'm tired of games. Out with it."

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I glanced at MacKenzie and von Altdorf and they nodded. And then, very briefly and holding his eyes with mine, I told young Mallory all the story of Prince Karl of Novodnia and of the unhappy lady who had been made his wife. Once, during the tale, he shoved the wine-glass toward MacKenzie, never taking his eyes from mine, and MacKenzie dropped into it a bit of the pungent fluid from his little vial, filled it up with water and nodded approvingly when the Irishman drank.

"And so, you see, Mallory," I concluded, "there's but the one thing to be done, a desperate thing maybe, and God knows how it may fall out, but the only thing."

For a long time after I finished he sat silent, staring at the wall and chafing his two hands together gently, as they rested upon the table's edge, but he wandered in no reveries this time, he peeped into no heavens led by his great green god. His face seemed to have changed to that of another man, keen, frowning a bit, close-mouthed and thoughtful.

I saw von Altdorf's eyes glisten excitedly, and even old MacKenzie's face had gained a bit of eager colour.

"Yes," said young Mallory at last, nodding his head. "Yes, you have the trick. It's the only thing to do, though as you've said, God knows how it may fall out. It's the only thing—an' now who's to do it?"

"Why—why *you*, man!" I cried. "Why, you of

course, did n't you understand? You're the only one could carry it through."

He stared at me an instant amazedly.

"I?" said he, "I?" with a little unbelieving laugh. "Come, man, you're joking. You don't mean it seriously? *I* do the thing? Oh I say!" and he burst out in a roar of laughter that died away quickly. I could see the swift course of his thoughts as well as if he had spoken them. I could see him picturing the possibilities of the scheme, balancing its risks, gloating over its dangers. It was just the reckless enterprise to take his fancy as I had known before I called him across the room.

Then all at once his face became puzzled.

"But—but I say!" he cried, "why did n't one of you go in for the part? Why did you drag me into it? Why not you, Creighton, or you, Colonel von Altdorf? I do n't quite understand."

"Why, you see," said I stammering a bit, and turning colour I've no doubt, "you see I—I could n't do it because ——" but MacKenzie interrupted me.

"There are excellent reasons," said he. "No use going into them. You are the man to do it, Mr. Mallory. You're used to deeficult situations an' dangers. Let be at that! Now we'll make it a business matter. We stand ready to offer you—no wait, wait a bit, man!—to offer you one thousand francs a month for your services. That will do away with your havin' to follow your regular voca-

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tion, for we could not think of bringin' you into the affair, that is none of yours, on other grounds."

The angry flush died slowly away from young Mallory's face as he considered.

"Why to be sure," said he thoughtfully, "I've my living to make, such as it is, and this will let me out of that cursed newspaper work for a bit. A thousand a month—forty quid! why that's luxury. And the checker game again—lives and deaths. By the saints, it gives me a genuine thrill. A quick eye and a ready hand and a mind lookin' three ways at once. Done, by the gods! *done*, gentlemen! I'm your man." And he laughed aloud joyously, and put out a hand to MacKenzie over the table. But MacKenzie was busy with the big *meerscham* just then.

As for von Altdorf, he was suddenly engaged in rolling a cigarette which seemed to demand his whole attention. And I—oh, I take no pride in telling it now—I was doing something wholly unnecessary to my *cravat*. And my cheeks burned red. I was not grown old in such matters like MacKenzie and von Altdorf.

Young Mallory looked at our faces quickly, in turn, then down at his outstretched hand and up again. He frowned a little, and his eyes were puzzled, hurt like a child's. He drew the hand back to him slowly and touched it with the other as if he thought there must be something wrong with it.

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"Why—gentlemen," he said in a little surprised stammering tone, "I—I do n't under——" Then all at once he halted and remained silent for a long time. His face flushed crimson and paled again.

"Ah!" said he at last, very low, "I think I—see—I'm the—cat's paw! You would n't do the thing yourselves, it's too—low. It's a bit of dirty work that you think no—gentleman could bring himself to, so you would n't do it—and—and you won't take the hand of the man who will do the thing. You were looking for a—a blackguard and you—chose me! Good God in heaven!"

He dropped his face into his hands for an instant. I think I have never seen such shame, such humiliation, in any eyes. I could n't bear to meet them.

"You—chose *me*?" said he again in a half whisper. "Why it *is* a rather blackguardly thing to do, is n't it, deceiving a woman? She'd trust us—me, utterly, would n't she? She would n't have a suspicion. She'd be happy, I expect, beautifully happy with it all, till—till she was told. Oh, it's damnable!" He caught up the half filled tumbler of absinthe and drained it at a gulp. "Damnable!" said he a little thickly, "damnable!"

Then,—after a moment, he began to laugh and his eyes grew heavy and a bit glazed once more.

It was as if MacKenzie's drug had held him for the few moments and then given way, all in an instant, at the first touch of the drink.

"Come, come, gentlemen," said he, "we must n't

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quarrel. Li'l' children love one 'nother. We've got work to do among us. You think I'm no—no gen'leman. I do n't care. Gimme my forty quid a month an' I'll do the work."

He made a sudden frowning effort to pull himself together and turned about to MacKenzie with a certain dignity.

"You—your logic, sir, is a bit beyond me," said he. "If it's blackguardly for me to do the thing, I can't see but it's—it's blackguardly in you to countenance it. When do you—when do you wish to commence?"

"We will commence," said the Scotsman, "at once, to-morrow. Every day's delay is a pressing danger." He looked down at the glasses before him. Even old MacKenzie could n't meet the Irishman's eyes just then. "As for your—your suspicions of our—attitude toward you, you're quite wrong of course, of course. We're equally responsible with you in everything. Now listen carefully please. You will be presented to—madame your wife. *Your* wife, you understand? by me. You will spend an hour or two of each day with her, at my house or in the garden, as she may prefer. The short interview will be explained to her on the grounds of her weak state and nervous condition. Of course, as a matter of fact, she will neither expect nor wish for more at the present, since you'll meet, ye understan', in a way o' speakin', as strangers. She'll not remember you.

When she's well enough and strong enough the whole thing shall be explained to her. My place, in case ye don't know, is the old convent property with the big garden, between the rue Denfert Rochereau, and the Boulevard Rasfail."

Young Mallory caught at the edge of the table.

"What?" he cried sharply. "What? Say that again, man! The big garden that backs upon the rue Boissonade?"

"The same," nodded MacKenzie.

"Great God!" said the Irishman softly, and his eyes were round and strange.

"Wait—wait! And the—the Princess walks—sometimes—in the garden, tall, very beautiful—brown bronze hair?"

"Well?" queried Sir Gavin.

"Why I—I have a—sort of studio in the rue Boissonade!" said young Mallory. It was as if he spoke to himself.

"I've seen the—Princess. I won't do it!" he cried suddenly. "By Heaven, I'm no blackguard, and you sha'n't make me one! I've done queer things in queer places, and I'm not proud of my life or of what I've done with it, but by my faith, I'll not play a scurvy trick upon that woman of all people in the world."

"You've agreed to do it," said MacKenzie quietly. "And if you don't do it that woman will very probably go mad in a week's or a fortnight's time."

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Young Mallory's elbows were upon the little table, and his head was between his hands.

"It's fate," said he in a whisper. "By my soul, it's fate, and none o' my doing. Actually to know her, touch her hand, look in her eyes. And God knows how it will all fall out! I tell you it's fate! I'll do your work, sir, never you fear. Here, waiter, an absinthe—and look sharp!"

MacKenzie put out a protesting hand, but the Irishman turned upon him savagely.

"Damme, sir!" he cried, and MacKenzie, no coward if you like, shrank back in his chair. "Damme, sir, you're buying my services for your forty quid a month, not my person nor my soul! If I choose to take a drink, by my faith I'll take it!" He dashed the water in upon the yellow liquor, and gulped it down. Then, in a moment, his chin dropped forward upon his breast and he babbled of little green devils and great green gods and of the sights and sounds of paradise.

MacKenzie shook his square Scotch head with a sigh. Colonel von Altdorf tugged moodily at his moustaches. There was a crease between his brows. In truth our game seemed but ill opened, and the hand we held a weak one.

"Come, gentlemen," I cried, in a tone that strove to be cheery, "come, we do no good by sitting late. To our beds, all of us! Remember to-morrow." I clapped young Mallory upon the shoulder, and he rose with a jerk. He seemed not badly off. He

walked with a fair steadiness, and held his tongue, but his eyes were heavy and glazed, the circles under them shockingly black, and the lines about his mouth showed, all at once, haggard and drawn. He turned and spoke to one of the waiters, who brought him, presently, wrapped in a bit of newspaper—a lump of ice.

“What, going to keep it up at home, old man?” I cried. “Oh, I say, remember you’ve to-morrow to think of!”

“Eh?” said young Mallory turning his sombre eyes upon me, “keep—keep what up?—I’ve four hours’ work to do yet, man. I’ve three thousand words to get out for my newspaper. The ice is to put in a towel and wrap my head in.”

“But Great Heaven, lad!” cried MacKenzie. “You’ve no need to worry about newspapers now! Chuck them up. You’re provided for.”

Mallory wrapped the bit of paper more closely about his lump of ice, and led the way out to the street.

“I promised them the thing,” said he simply. “You would n’t have me break my word?—I think we walk the same way, sir. Are you ready?”

Von Altdorf and I stood under the awning of the terrasse and watched the two up the Boulevard Montparnasse.

“Would n’t disappoint his paper because he’d given his word,” mused von Altdorf. “Going to sit up all night with ice on his head to keep a

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promise—and soaked in absinthe from heels to hair!
—Oh well, one lives and learns, my friend. Now
I should have said that man was impossible—out
of a story book.—One lives and learns.”

“I wish I’d shaken hands with him,” said I.

“You’ll wish that more heartily still before the
last card’s played,” said Colonel von Altdorf.
“Yonder’s a man!”

CHAPTER III

THE old convent garden by the Boulevard Raspail is a quaint still place of coolness and of odour, of damp, black mold underfoot, mossy with age, of prim, orderly rows of trees and shrubs, of mellow sunshine splashed with shadows, of green isolation, of peace beyond belief; a walled quiet where the outer world never penetrates.

There are many such in old Paris, though few, perhaps, so large. They lie asleep behind those high, blank stuccoed walls with spiked tops and a "Defense d'Afficher" printed black across them, that you pass in your walks or on top of your tooting tram. You may see the tops of the great trees peeping over the walls' coping, you may catch, if it be springtide, a great whiff of perfume, lilac or chestnut or acacia, borne out to you by some vagrant little puff of wind, but the mysteries that lie behind that fifteen feet of stone and plaster you may not solve, save, once in a long time, a tiny postern door set perchance in the high wall may be by accident left ajar. Then you shall see such old world quiet, such ordered peace, such guarded sweetness!

The big convent garden is—as has been said—a triangle, with its apex and a portion of one side

filled by the former convent buildings. Its sides that lie along the Boulevard Raspail and the rue Denfert Rochereau are walled to a great height. No eye may spy upon that green seclusion. Its base is the blank, rear wall of the long barrack-like row of studio buildings, two stories high, that face in the rue Boissonade. A blank, rear wall I said. That is not quite true. There is—or was—one window, a small one, set—heaven knows why—about ten feet from the ground of the garden below. It belongs to the studio at the end of the long row, at the inner end of the little street, for the rue Boissonade is properly no rue at all, but an impasse. This studio was occupied, at the time of which I write, by young Denis Mallory, ex-soldier of fortune, present writer of descriptive articles for a London weekly paper.

A quaint still place of coolness and odours. The odours come blended from everywhere, from the black earth, stained green with moss here and there, and always damp—as in a cellar—from the rows of great lilac bushes that stand along the high street walls—when the lilacs are in flower the perfume is well-nigh stupefying—from the chestnuts and acacias that stand severely arow up and down the garden, their trunks black and smooth with years ; from the mignonette and little spice pinks and red single roses that fill the round beds at the corners of the walls. There is a gravel walk down through the middle of all, with a border

of little whitened stones, and another path that runs around the enclosure under the walls.

In the very centre is the fountain, of marble. It was white, once, and fine with scrolls and ornamentation, but the marble is stained yellow and green with age, and the carved vines and leaves and fruit are broken. A living vine twists and clings triumphantly where the sculptor's challenged admiration so long ago. Doubtless the new vine is the better one. The carved stone margin of the basin is cracked too and stained, roots have forced their way between the joints, and moss has filled the bottom of the pool, but that doesn't matter so much, for only a gurgling spurt of water trickles down from the fount nowadays.

Even the marble seats, that stand in a broken circle about the fountain, are stained, cracked and broken, and the sundial, uplifted near by on its pedestal, is hidden in a mass of vines.

You might sit here all the day long, if you liked, bathing yourself in the yellow sunshine that seems always warm but never hot, or hiding under the cool green shade, breathing in a fragrance exquisite, aromatic, a blended essence of all delightful smells; and you would be as utterly out of the world, as far away from its noise and hurry and strife as if you were alone in the Hesperides. It would be still, of a stillness unbelievable! No sounds would reach you from over those high stone walls but the toot of a passing tram, the tinkle of its bell, the

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whistle of a street gamin, the bell from a near-by chapel ; and these made somehow thin and faint as if from a great distance, unreal and alien.

Ah, it's a good old place ! A quaint old sweet old place, the great green convent garden by the Boulevard Raspail !

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Sir Gavin and young Denis Mallory stood in the grey stone porch, a beautiful old crumbling Gothic porch, of what had been the refectory of the convent. Young Mallory was a bit haggard from the night before, a bit pale and drawn as to the cheeks, and black as to the eyes, but otherwise quite himself ; an earlier self, one would have said. There was a something of boyishness about him, a something of eagerness, a light in the eye ; and his hand was not quite steady.

"Ye'll be careful, lad," warned MacKenzie. "Remember always that she's in a nervous state so extreme that it's nigh hysteria. Ye'll be cautious."

"Aye," said young Mallory, impatiently. "Aye, haven't I been coached for two hours ? I'm letter perfect." And his eyes strayed down the length of the garden below them.

MacKenzie heaved a great sigh.

"God knows," said he, shaking his great head. "God knows. Eh, well, be off with ye, an' have it over."

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Young Mallory went down the gravel path between the great chestnut-trees.

It was one of those unseasonably warm afternoons that come sometimes at the end of April or early in May, a heat that forewarns the approaching summer, that makes the sunshine oppressive, draws the young leaves from their twigs almost while one watches them.

It had brought the sticky buds of the chestnut into flower all in a day, so that their fragrance, heavy and tropical, mingled with that of the passing lilacs, filled all the great high walled garden with scent. It was like a greenhouse.

Something moved, down among the trees and shrubs beyond the fountain, something red and white, and young Mallory's heart gave a sudden leap. Then in a moment he was before her.

She faced him, half startled, breathing quickly. She was tall, very tall, and moved regally, like a queen, in her white gown and long crimson cloak. I fancy one saw her eyes first—after the majesty of her bearing. They were blue, a clouded purplish blue, like—like nothing else in the world, southern seas, maybe, Italian lakes,—midnight skies when she was troubled or thoughtful—very long, and at times wide, and deep set under straight level brows. She'd a slender straight little nose, high bridged, and tip tilted—oh the very littlest bit in the world! She'd a mouth all soft curves, drooping at the corners, its upper lip quite absurdly short and curled

outward, and overhanging greatly the lower one! Her chin—it was an English chin, I protest, not an American one—was pointed and clean cut and set forward prominently over the loveliest full throat that a sculptor could fancy. And her hair was brown, a waving, crinkly brown, save where the sun fell upon it. There it was red bronze, a living fire. It was parted somewhere at one side, and heaped over her brows, and a great knot of it hung at the back of her neck. Ah, but there are no words for the sumptuous loveliness of her! for the poise of her beautiful head, for the lithe sway of her round waist. She was slender, I'd have you know, slender of waist, but very broad in the shoulders, as out of door young women sometimes are, deep bosomed and flat backed, pink as a rosy goddess, save when she was ill and suffering.

She showed her late desperate illness but little, outwardly. She was a bit pale, and her hands and cheeks were thinner than their wont—as we learned afterward,—but they were so perfectly modelled, so wonderful in line and contour that they suffered for the lack of roundness hardly at all. There were faint dark circles under her eyes too. They showed when she turned her head a bit, and looked away.

Her head was bent, now, eyes under cover, and the stormy breathing would not be hidden. Young Mallory stood before her quite motionless—as for *his* breathing it had quite ceased long since, but his eyes devoured her, feasted upon every gorgeous line

and tint, revelled there. I think that in that moment all his promises and plans, all he had come to the garden to perform, all the plot and deception that had been woven about the girl before him, went in a flash from his mind, and he thought, if his brain acted at all, only of the wonderful beauty and loveliness of her, only that she was cruelly beset by fate, helpless in a net that she might not see; and that he must free her somehow, if it cost his life to do so.

They stood so, motionless, not speaking for a long time, till at last young Mallory forced his eyes from her face and held out his hands.

"Eleanor!" said he in that deep tender voice of his. "Eleanor!" No one could resist Mallory when he spoke like that. No one could be afraid or distrustful or cold. Alas, it's a wise provision of Providence that we have n't all such voices.

The girl raised her head with a little low nervous laugh and put her hands quickly into his.

"Ah, you've—you've come at last!" she cried softly. "It's—really—you?"

She had given him but the swiftest glance when he came down the gravel path toward her, but now her great eyes searched him, wide with a certain breathless eagerness—with a certain half frightened timidity, wondering a little. She searched him through and through.

Young Mallory drew the two slim hands together in his and stroked them gently. There was

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a little steady smile upon his lips. No one could resist Mallory when he smiled like that. No one could be afraid or distrustful or cold. The girl's lips curved to the faintest answering smile, but her eyes never left his.

"Well?" said young Mallory presently, "will I do, Eleanor?"

The girl gave another little nervous laugh and drew her hands away.

"I—I'm afraid you'll have to do, won't you?" said she. "It is n't quite a matter of choice, is it?"

"Yes," said young Mallory very gently. "Yes, it is a matter of choice, Eleanor. I'm not quite a brute, you know." He had an indistinct notion that this was not playing the game at all as he was supposed to play it. What if she should take him at his word and send him away? But he put the notion aside quite calmly. It seemed not to weigh with him at all.

"Why as for—as for that," said the girl looking down again, "I'm not disappointed, you know, not a bit. Ah, I'm glad you're so big!" she cried and smiled up at him. "I—was afraid you might be little and—fat. I hate fat people! Why, I have to look up to you, haven't I? And I'm very tall, as tall as a great many of the men I've known. You're not a bit what I'd fancied and—made mental pictures of. Ah, is n't it all wonderful, Karl?"

"Karl? Karl?" said young Mallory to himself in a puzzled tone. "What does she mean by —"

Oh, of course! Karl, of course! Keep your wits about you, you ass!"

"I wonder if fate ever played such a strange trick upon a girl before. I wonder why fate chose me?" She moved slowly over to one of the moss stained marble benches that stood near the fountain, and sank down upon it. Young Mallory sat near her.

"It was a cruel trick," she went on, "ingeniously cruel! Fancy a girl married to a man whom she doesn't remember ever to have seen or heard of! It would be funny, wouldn't it, if it were n't terrible?"

"Terrible?" smiled Denis Mallory.

The girl threw out her hand with a deprecating little laugh.

"Ah, you know what I mean, don't you?" she cried. "It is n't you that's terrible, it's the whole affair, the strangeness of it, the pitifulness of it—I know I'm your wife, Karl, but—do n't you see that I can't feel like it? Do n't you see that you're an utter stranger to me, that whatever I may have known of you—cared for you, there at home, it's simply wiped away, made as if it never had been? You'll have to be very good to me, Karl, very patient and gentle and—forbearing. You will have to let me like you—care for you, all over again."

"If that is possible," said young Denis Mallory very low.

"Why yes—yes, of course," said she slowly, "if

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that is possible—— I think—I think it's more than—possible," said the Princess Eleanor, turning her beautiful head away from him. Then in a moment she looked up laughing.

"Why, I believe you were trying to trap me into saying something pretty to you!" she cried. "You were fishing! The idea of your trying to flirt with me!" She regarded him meditatively with her head on one side.

"I don't know that I mind being flirted with," said the Princess Eleanor. "Men used to flirt with me—lots."

"Beasts!" growled young Mallory, and the Princess laughed.

"Tiens, jealous?" she cried. "Oh, mon Prince!" and she beat her small hands together delightedly.

"I'm jealous of every man who ever saw you," said young Mallory, and indulged in a wholly honest and quite portentous scowl.

"You need n't be," said the girl. She leaned toward him, a little, on the old stone bench, and put up her two hands upon his shoulders. The great blue eyes searched him—as before, through and through.

"Never mind the other men, Karl," said she. "There's no other man that counts. Upon my faith, there is n't. I'm married to you and I shall be true to you—always. Only—give me time, time to know you better, to care for you as I ought before I come to Novodnia with you. You may see me, like this, every day—you will, won't you?"

Flirt with me, Karl, make love to me, make me care for you. I—I think I've never known any man who could make me care so much as you could. Ah, if I only could tell you how glad I am that you're—what you are, big and strong and—tender—the sort of man a girl loves! I've been hideously worried and ill and all that because you didn't come to me sooner. I—I thought they were keeping you from me. Oh, I'd all sorts of dreadful suspicions—but you're here now, and I'm to see you every day, am I not? You shall see how soon I'll be well and strong once more. Please do n't look so solemn and sad over it. Smile at me again, Karl, you've the kindest, dearest smile I ever saw. It makes one so comfortable! It makes one see how tender and true you are and how utterly one may trust you."

Mallory shrank away from the two clinging hands and the great blue eyes. His face was crimson.

"Ah, you make me feel a brute, Eleanor!" he cried miserably. "A blackguard!"

But the girl laughed.

"You, a brute?" said she, "you, a blackguard, Karl? Do n't be silly—why of course I know that a man is n't—is n't quite like a girl, you know. He has a rougher life to live. He has to see things and to know about things that a girl never hears of, but—a blackguard? You haven't a blackguard's smile, my Prince, nor a blackguard's eyes.

No, I think I can trust you. The only witness against the prisoner is prejudiced by a most uncommon modesty.—Not Guilty, Sir. That's the verdict. The jury did n't have even to leave its box."

She leaned back against the black smooth trunk of a chestnut that stood behind the stone bench, and rested her head there, face upward to the warm sunshine that came flooding through the new leaves and interlaced branches above, bathed her in a golden glory splashed with shadows. Mallory turned his eyes away.

"Haven't you anything to say to me at all?" complained the Princess after a time.

"Eh what?—Oh yes, yes!" said Mallory pulling himself together with a jerk. He ventured another glance at the upturned face in its flood of mellow sunlight and looked quickly away again.

"I've so much to say," he declared, "that I don't know where to begin and what to tell you first. I want to tell you a great deal about you, what you look like and all that, you know, but I must n't. You said I must begin gently—I'll tell you that to-morrow—or next week maybe."

"You—you might forget by that time," ventured the Princess wistfully. "Could n't you—begin it—now—very, *very* gently, you know. Not that it matters, of course!" she protested with some haste. "I dare say I look very much like other women—do n't I?"

"No you do n't," said young Mallory, "you know

quite well that you do n't. You're the—you're the most gor—no, I'm hanged if I'll tell—not to-day—besides, I could n't if I should try."

"Oh, very well," said the Princess loftily, "if you want to be disagreeable about it, you may. Tell me why you did n't come to me sooner. I thought — Oh I thought all sorts of mad things. They kept putting me off from day to day, Dr. Mac——, Sir Gavin MacKenzie and the others. I could n't fancy what was the matter."

Mallory took a long breath of relief. This was safer.

"Why you see," said he, "the country has been in a shocking state lately and I could n't leave it. My accession brought up a row of old standing, and I'd a hard time keeping the throne under me. It's all the fault of those beasts of Pavelovitches. They're, in a way, pretenders to the throne, you know, and they're Pan-Slavists, which means that they're ready to lick the Czar's boots if he crooks his finger. What we want in Novodnia is independence, no Russian patronage nor Austrian either. We've always been and always must be independent like Roumania, or like Bulgaria was before they slaughtered old Stambolof. That's the policy of our house and that's what I've been struggling to maintain. It's no easy matter.

"Now that," he continued inwardly, "that is what I call a very excellent and patriotic little speech—for a chap who's never been nearer Novodnia than Belgrade."

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But the Princess seemed not greatly impressed or even interested.

"Oh yes," she admitted, "all that sounds very political and desperate and shivery but still I do n't see why you could n't have left your friends to do that for you. Now if *I'd* recently married a girl and she was terribly ill, in danger of her life, indeed, I think I'd manage to leave politics for a while and go to her. Of course I do n't know what Pan-Slavists are, and why Bulgaria and Roumania aren't just alike, but it seems to me they might have been civil enough to wait till you could come back."

"Oh Lord!" groaned Mallory in despair. "Commend me to a woman for an appreciation of practical affairs! Politics, Eleanor? Politics! Do you think this thing is a New York municipal election? Do you know what would happen if I were to lose down there? It would be war, war! There'd be a small detachment of Russian troops quietly hustled over the border; that Pavelovitch swine would be set in my seat and I'd be—buried with my fathers. You'd make an interesting widow, Eleanor."

But the Princess gave a little cry of alarm and her eyes were very wide and round.

"Oh, is it so serious as that?" she demanded. "Ah, forgive me, Karl! I—I did n't know—I did n't realise what it meant. War?—and you killed? Ah, be careful, Karl, do n't run risks unless

you have to. You've some one else to think of now, you know."

"Yes, God bless her," said young Mallory. "And I'm thinking of her always, Eleanor, but I've my country to think of first, you know. I must do what I was brought into the world to do, cost what it may. Did you think I stopped down there away from you because I wanted to? Novodnia comes first, because I'm first a ruler—a man afterward."

"‘Yet this inconstancy is such,’" he quoted, laughing a little, "‘As thou too shalt adore. I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not—loved I ——’" And he paused, stammering, and turned his face away with a sudden fierce passion of hatred for all this contemptible deception, storming within him.

"‘Loved I not honour more,’" said the Princess Eleanor softly. "Ah, that's like you, Karl! ‘Loved I not honour more.’ Honour's first, is n't it? I'd not hold you back when honour called you. I'd not even wish you back, for I know that your honour is the dearest thing in the world to you—you're that sort of man, thank God. You'd never fail in a duty, nor take an unfair advantage nor play a man or a woman a low trick. See how much I've learned of you in an hour, my Prince!"

But young Mallory sprang to his feet, teeth and hands clenched.

"By my faith, Eleanor!" he cried in an agony,

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"I won't let you think such things of me! I won't have you so impos ——"

"Karl!" said the Princess Eleanor, and young Mallory bit his words in two. She rose to her feet and came around to face him, putting a hand upon his breast.

Her great eyes met his, clouded a little, anxious and pained, full for an instant of a trembling doubt, but she shook her head, smiling confidently into his face, and dropped the hand by her side.

"Don't frighten me, Karl," she said. "I—I'm not quite strong enough yet, you know, and my nerves have a nasty way of giving out at times. It's like you to think poorly of yourself, but don't think too poorly, for that's as bad as the other extreme. Come and take a little walk, mon Prince; I'm cold, just the least bit, from sitting still. We'll walk around the gravel path under the walls."

Mallory shook his head as if he would free himself from some load that was there, and squared his shoulders.

"Forgive me, Eleanor," said he. "Did I startle you? I must n't do that, must I? For you're not well yet, not by a good deal. That makes a great difference, does n't it?" He spoke somehow as if he were arguing with himself. "Come, we'll walk. We shall have a carpet of lilac blossoms to walk over instead of gravel. See how fast they are falling!"

Indeed, as they walked, they walked in a rain of tiny lavender blossoms. A puff of breeze from over the wall's coping, the touch of an elbow to a slender branch, brought a fragrant shower.

"My hair is loaded with petals," cried the Princess Eleanor. "It's like confetti on *Mi Carême*. Brush them out, Karl." She bent her head to him with a sudden little gesture like a child having its hair done. Indeed, despite her height and regal bearing, she was full of little unexpected childish tricks, infinitely dear.

Mallory's fingers did their bidding but ill. They lingered in the soft bronze waves, touched them caressingly, but trembled there, helpless. And he drew his hands away with a quick exclamation.

"Ah, Eleanor!" he cried, "I—I can't!"

The Princess moved past him quickly, her head still bent very low. When he came up behind her, her cheeks were flaming.

They passed under the one little window in the wall, at the base of the garden, the window in Mallory's studio. He glanced up at it instinctively. Eager faces gleamed through the parting of the curtains, arms waved, fingers beckoned.

"What the deuce is up?" wondered young Mallory.

Then aloud,

"MacKenzie said I was to keep you out but a little while to-day, Eleanor; I suppose you ought to be going in. It's growing a bit cooler. We

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mustn't forget that you're not strong, must we?"

"Ah, no," said she, "we mustn't forget that—though I shall be strong as ever, soon. Yes, I suppose I must go in. Will you come to the door with me, Karl? Oh, has n't it been a beautiful day! And is n't our garden perfect! You'll come to-morrow, won't you? I—I shall be waiting for you. Why, here's Jess! My Cousin Jessica, you know—of course you do know, though. You must have met her at Newport at our—our—— Oh, Karl, Karl, our wedding!"

The dark haired young girl, waiting under the grey Gothic porch, gave Mallory her hand, and said, "Oh yes, of course, they had met at Newport," but she looked into his eyes very gravely, questioningly, as if she would measure him.

"She knows," said Mallory to himself. "She's in it too, then." The girl moved close to his side as the Princess passed up the steps.

"They're waiting for you in your rooms," she whispered. "Go there at once!"

Mallory went quickly down through the garden and stood again under the window. MacKenzie, von Altdorf and I were waiting above, and I reached out an arm to pull him up to the ledge. Then the four of us sat down about the room and stared into one another's faces. Three of us, I know, were very pale and a bit breathless. Young Mallory looked tired, worn, as if he had been

through some great strain, and had come into its consequent relaxation. He seemed not particularly to notice our excitement or indeed our presence.

MacKenzie made a motion of his hand to Colonel von Altdorf and that gentleman turned to young Mallory.

“Now, God help us all, Mr. Mallory,” said he, “for Prince Karl has—Heaven knows how—eluded his officers and gentlemen and is on his way to Paris—do you hear, man? *The Prince is on his way to Paris!*”

CHAPTER IV

“**A** H?” said young Mallory absently. I suppose he had heard the words, but upon my faith I do n’t believe they had conveyed to his mind anything at all. He rose from the broad divan where he had been sitting, and moved over to the little turkish table littered with pipes and cigarette boxes and tins of tobacco, and he chose a battered old briar which he filled and lighted with great deliberation.

“Look you, gentlemen,” said he facing us at last, pipe in hand, “before this—this enterprise of ours goes any further, I wish to correct the footing upon which we—upon which I stand. Last evening I agreed to do my part for—a money consideration. I didn’t realise as well as I do now, what the thing implied. I was even—intoxicated. I wish you clearly to understand that there is to be no question of money between us. God knows the trick we play is low enough without soiling it further. I play my hand in it because it seems to me there is nothing else to be done. The trick must be played but let there be no money about it.”

I caught von Altdorf’s eyes searching for mine. They were very bright and he nodded his head and

smiled. I thought of his words of the night before, under the awning of the Café d'Alençon, when I had said that I wished I'd shaken hands with Mallory. "You'll wish that more heartily still before the last card's played. Yonder's a man."

But our immediate and pressing danger made everything else seem of little moment.

"Aye, aye, lad!" cried old MacKenzie, impatiently. "As ye like! But God in Heaven, have ye not heard? The Prince is comin' to Paris and can't be stopped!"

Young Mallory dropped suddenly into a chair and his teeth shut with a click. All his face seemed to sharpen, whiten, grow in an instant fierce and ready.

"The Prince—coming—to Paris?" he said in a slow whisper. The first white fierceness of his face passed, the animal at bay and ready to fight, and he seemed to be thinking deeply. I learnt to know that pose later on, body sprawled out over the chair, knees apart, hands clasping and relaxing, chin on breast, and those deep eyes of his wide and staring out into vacancy under level brows.

But presently his lips twitched and curved from their hard line into a smile, and he sprang to his feet, laughing as if something amused him beyond words. By my faith there was little humour that the rest of us could see in the situation.

"Why, now!" he cried, laughing still, "why that's more like it! Now it's to be a game, by

Heaven! not just deceiving a helpless girl." He looked about the circle of our glum faces and burst into a roar of laughter, stretching his arms up over his head as if he saw the struggle before him and gloried in it.

"Like old times, by Jove!" he cried. "Aye, it's to be a game! A game worth playing. Come, come, gentlemen, have you all lost your last dear relative on earth? Buck up, buck up!" He clapped von Altdorf upon the shoulder gaily.

"Come, Colonel," said he, "you in the mourning party too? Faith, it's a funeral! Come, have we two sat at our ease before the fire all our lives that we should turn pale and groan over a danger? Leave that to our friend the Birthday Knight and the light o' society here. What have we fought and schemed and plotted for all our lives, Colonel, if we're to lie down at the first hint of difficulty? Think of it! A game to play! We've played before, eh Colonel? Man, man, does n't it make your blood tingle? Where's your spirit?"

He stuck the old briar pipe in one corner of his mouth and puffed great clouds from it. His face beamed through the smoke. His eyes were wide and joyous. I'd never seen them quite the same.

And, as I live, there was von Altdorf on his feet too, tugging at his grizzled moustache, as was his way when excited. His eyes twinkled and he put out his hands upon young Mallory's shoulders and shook him gently.

"Aye," said he. "Aye, I've fought and schemed a bit in my time, and I've a drop of blood left to jump on occasion. Aye, we've played before, we two. I wish we'd played together, for by my faith in God you're a man after my own heart. Let Karl come if he likes! Saints above! His wife sha'n't see him till she's able, if I have to carry him back to Novodnia under my arm!"

Old MacKenzie scowled and twisted in his chair.

"That's all very well, ye two blood-thirsty conspirators," said he. "But what's to be done? When ye're through with your heroics maybe ye'll condescend to look at the danger we're in."

As for me I held a sulky silence. I had n't relished being called a light of society.

Mallory dropped into a chair and shook his head at the Scotsman with a humorous sigh.

"You've no blood in your body, man," said he, "though I'm not denying that you've sense in your head. And now to business! Will the Prince come alone or shall we have a half dozen to deal with?"

"Oh, he'll come alone," said von Altdorf. "Never you fear—though, for all that, it would n't surprise me if half a dozen should follow to spy out what he's doing."

"And they'll be ——?" queried Mallory.

"They'll be enemies, Russian jackals, the Czar's playthings, damn them!" snarled von Altdorf, "only waiting their chance to seat their George

where Prince Karl sits now—or should be sitting. God's name! he's mad to leave the country at such a time, mad!"

"He's mad for love of his wife," said I, "and who's to blame him? Haven't we all seen her? Wouldn't any one of us leave a throne for her?"

Von Altdorf struck his knee a resounding thwack.

"Love!" he cried. "Love! Shall love stand before the welfare of a nation, man? Shall love wreck a state? Is there no such thing as a ruler's honour and duty? I say he's mad to come here! God knows I'm full enough of pity for the loveliest woman I ever saw, but I serve the Novodnian crown, and I'd serve it ill to countenance Prince Karl's leaving his throne for a woman who can never sit by his side there."

"Yet she's his Princess, right enough," said I stubbornly.

"She's his wife," said von Altdorf. "Princess by courtesy, if you like. Yet another Princess there must be in time, as you know, or the crown goes to that swine George and his litter."

"But what's to happen eventually?" I persisted. "We're curing a present ill—or trying to, but what's to happen when Madame, here, regains her health and is told the trick we've played upon her? She'll be the Prince's wife still."

Von Altdorf threw up his hands.

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"God knows," said he. "It's out of our hands. We can't see beyond our present business. There might be a divorce arranged—even against the Prince's will. Madame might be brought to see the necessity of it. Or it's just possible that she might be ennobled—though that's almost out of the question. Don't worry us, man. The future's the future, and its problems haven't to be met till to-morrow. To-day's dangers are enough to busy our hands. Heaven knows it would have been simpler if Madame had never recovered from her hurts, though I've no heart for saying it. What's before us now, is to keep the Prince from seeing her, for both their sakes—and to get him back to Novodnia as soon as ever we may."

Mallory had been smoking and listening, eyes half closed, and a thoughtful crease between his brows.

"When did you receive the message saying that he'd left Novodnia?" he asked.

"An hour ago," said von Altdorf. "It was sent last night, via Belgrade, of course. If he comes through without stopping—and that's what he'll do right enough—he will be here in three days' travel. To-day's Tuesday, isn't it? He started yesterday afternoon. He should reach Paris Thursday. He'll probably come at once to my apartment in the Avenue de l'Observatoire. We've still two days to make ready, you see."

"It would n't do, I suppose," suggested Mallory,

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"to tell him that the Princess has gone back to America? He would n't believe it, eh?"

Von Altdorf shook his head.

"That would n't do at all—he'd know better. He's had semi-weekly reports right along from MacKenzie. He knows she's here in MacKenzie's care. Besides, if he were really convinced that she'd gone to America, upon my word I believe he'd be off there himself. You don't know the Prince. When he sets his mind upon a thing he's apt to get it."

"He won't get this," said young Mallory shortly, and his teeth shut again with a click. "Ah well, I see nothing for it but simply to refuse to let him see her, to tell him she's in too dangerous a state to risk a shock. It's a poor excuse and a bold one, but, curse it, he's got to swallow what we've a mind to tell him. Perhaps some better plan will turn up meanwhile. We must trust something to the cards as they're dealt ——— Egad, we might do worse than to kidnap him and ship him back to Novodnia, as von Altdorf here, says, under somebody's arm."

MacKenzie grunted.

"I observe," said he sourly, "a certain lack o' timeedity about you, lad. Boldness is all well enough, but man, man, descretion's the better part o' valour. Look before ye leap or ye may land in the pit."

"God's grace, MacKenzie!" cried young Mallory

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with a laugh. "'T is the pit we're in now and some great leaping it's going to take to win out o' the same. You can't see the ground about, when you're in a pit, MacKenzie, you can only leap, by the grace o' God, and trust to your luck as to where you land —— Ah well! enough of that. What's to do now? Nothing but wait, I take it. Shall we meet here to-morrow at this time? I've an engagement—by your leave—with Madame the Princess in the garden at three. And now I'm for my dinner. Faith, how conspiracy whets a man's appetite! Who's with me?"

"I'm with you," said I.

CHAPTER V

WE walked over to the Boulevard St. Michel—it was on the edge of dark, and the streets were full of home-coming labourers and students and shop girls—and turned down that wicked and happy thoroughfare past the darkened portals of the Bal Bullier, down to where the cafés shone resplendent with their brilliantly lighted terrasses, and where one had to elbow one's way through a packed throng of swaggering students and ladies of a pronounced and friendly bearing.

The good old Boul' Miche'!—your pardon! I would say the bad old Boul' Miche'! How it comes up before me now, though I like to pretend that I'm grown old and discreet and very respectable, and done with such follies. How it comes up before me, if only I shut my eyes and forget that I'm just round the corner from Piccadilly, lapped in the chastened sobriety of London—that I'm going out to dine presently at my club with a curate and two barristers—— Lights and chatter and the clink of glasses upon little round iron tables, dusk growing to darkness out beyond in the street, the clatter of hooves that strike fire from the paving

stones, a huge, ungainly steam tram that puffs and pants its way up the hill, a whiff of perfume from the trees that line the curb, a never-ending throng of students crowding past, *étudiants* and *étudiantes*, bearded students and mustachioed students, old style students with long beards and capes and soft hats, smoking their queer ugly pipes—*vieux Jacobs*—and smarter, newer style students with shining hats and padded frock coats, smoking cigarettes; Jews, Germans, Russians, Greeks, Negroes, doctors, lawyers, merchants, thieves—and ladies with *pompadours* and a ready smile. That is the *Boul' Miche'*! There's no care there, nor worry nor thought for the morrow. *C'est pas trop sérieux, voyez vous*, the old *Boul' Miche'*! Cares have been left in the lecture room or atelier or lodging. One drops them with a shake the moment one steps into the gay street. One digs one's hands into one's pockets, one puffs a devil-may-care cloud to the glooming skies, and moves with an unconscious swagger toward one's favourite terrace, the Pantheon, or the *d'Harcourt* (alas!) or the *Source*, and there one settles into a chair behind a tiny table and orders one's absinthe, Pernod or *Cusénier*, one's Turin bitter, one's *sirop à l'eau de Seltz*, one's vermouth sec, and lingers over it through the "green hour" listening contentedly to the chatter about one, to the calling of names, *Fifines* and *Saras* and *Maries* and *Colettes*; *Georges* and *Alphonse*s and *Eduard*s; to the desperate cries of overworked waiters who

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struggle beneath trays of glasses or hold five bottles by the necks with one set of fingers.

"V'la M'sieur! v'la, v'la!" to an importunate customer, "versez, versee ez!" to the "omnibus" who pours the coffee into the glass they have banged down before you.

Then, later, when one has drained the last drop of one's aperatif and paid one's seven or eight sous, one rises lazily and makes one's way arm in arm with Georges or Eduard or, alas! Fifine or Colette, to one's favourite restaurant; Wiber's, where the Chateaubriands are so thick and juicy, and the Burgundy—that Chambertin at four francs the pint—so rich, or across the street to Boulant's, or down to the little Duval, or even over the river to the Palais Royal arcades, to Larue's, to Marguery's, to a dozen delightful places.

And after dinner, why it's all to do over again, the sitting at a terrasse under the big awning, though over a coffee and a liqueur this time, till, if it be a Sunday or a Thursday or a Saturday night, one must rise, toward ten o'clock, and move with the throng up the hill far up past the lighted cafés, to the Place where Maréchal Ney waves his sword on high, and where the great sculptured arch stands over the portal to the Bal Bullier; then under the arch and down upon the great polished floor where Fifine and Colette will pull at your coat lapels and beg you to waltz with them, a l'Americain.

Ah, the good old Boul' Miche'!—your pardon! I

would say the bad old Boul' Miche'! It brings a rakish gleam to the eyes, a ribald flush to the cheek, of a certain sedate and Britishly respectable old codger who's engaged to dine, later on, with a curate and two barristers. Helas! he'd rather dine at Wiber's with Fifine or Colette—but he would n't admit it to the curate.

We stopped, Mallory and I, at the Café du Pantheon and after some trouble found a vacant table on the crowded terrasse. Quite half the people at the tables seemed to know Denis Mallory and hailed him vociferously with outstretched hands or raised glasses. "St. Denis" they called him—I grievously fear it was in irony — Oh, well, there were quite enough of them, dear old vagabonds, who knew me as well, and had a pet name for me too. I may n't cavil at Mallory.

He took absinthe, Pernod, in spite of my frown. I remember that he even spoke sharply to the waiter for pouring him, as he thought, too small an allowance. It made me curse, to see him gulp down the half of it without lowering his glass.

We went on, later, down to Boulant's—because you may find no such cancales on the Boulevard as at Boulant's—where that majestic personage, the Dame du Comptoir, had a welcoming smile for us, and for Mallory a rallying jest. We mounted to one of the smaller rooms, au premier, and took a table in the corner. Mallory's greeting to the

pleasing young person in the red hair and white apron who put the carte before us, bespoke an acquaintance of a certain intimacy. And we ordered a great many cancales, those queer, yellow oysters that look like clams and taste like seaweed and copper—one grows tremendously keen on them,—and a filet mignon all smothered in sauce béarnaise, and some flageolets, maître d’hotel—my word, I can taste them now—and a wonderful crisp salad of lettuce and chicory, with cheese to come after, Pont l’Eveque, and coffee, and for wine, a certain strange and delicious vin gris de Touraine of ’82. I had to quarrel with Mallory over this. He wanted an atrociously heavy and potent Spanish Pajarete of ’75, a veritable syrop, for which Boulant’s is famous.

He was curiously quiet during the meal, frowning and distrait. Nothing could rouse him, neither the superexcellence of the filet mignon nor my attempts at wit. He drank his vin gris de Touraine as if it were rouge ordinaire at fifty centimes the litre, never sniffed its exquisite bouquet nor closed his eyes in content over its keen flavour. Something seemed weighing upon him, depressing him beyond hope of recall.

“Come, come, man!” said I in despair, “I’ve asked you a question twice and you’ve stared through me. What’s got into you? An hour ago you were gay enough, Lord knows! Come, wake up, tell us your troubles.”

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Mallory pulled himself together with a little shivering jerk.

"Some one walking over my grave!" he muttered. "Eh, lad? eh?—Aye, I'm a bit blue. The devils have me, papillons noirs!—I've been seeing things."

"Now, by heaven," said I, "if you'd just see us a way out of our troubles, while you're at it, it would be jolly worth while. Just see us a way to win our game, will you?"

"Win?" said Mallory in his low, dull voice. "Aye, we'll win, right enough. Never fear that, we'll win.—We, say I?—You'll win, Creighton, man, the rest of you, not I, by my soul! I never win, I've no luck. You'll win, but I'll lose."

And to that I found nothing to reply, for as I live, I saw nothing that Denis Mallory might win from the game. If he won his hand 't was for the Prince, not himself—and I'd not seen Mallory's face down there in the garden with Madame, for nothing, nor when he was told that Karl was on his way to Paris.

"I never win," said he hopelessly, fingering the little cheese knife that lay by his plate, and marking with it upon the white cloth.

"I play my hand, I fight my battle or plot my scheme and some other man takes the prize. I've no luck. Look you! You know what I've done, why am I not rich? Why is n't my coat covered with fool little jewelled crosses? I've won for-

tunes for other men and orders for their breasts, but no fortune for my pocket and no ribbons for my buttonhole. No, I've no luck."

"Oh, as for that," said I, still trying to cheer him up, "what are any of us to win'out of this business? We're in it, just as you are, to save a woman, to try a fall with Fate. There's no question of our getting anything out of it."

But he would n't be drawn.

"I never win," he muttered absently, still marking with the little knife upon the cloth. "What's the use of playing?"

"Why none!" said I in a cheery tone. "None at all! Let's chuck it up! It's a sorry business, let it take care of itself, chuck it up, man, chuck it up!"

That drew him at last.

"Chuck it up?" he cried savagely. "Not while I've the use of my arms and legs! Are you mad, Creighton? Chuck it up? Great God in Heaven! if I thought you meant that—— Ah, come, come, say you're joking, old chap. Do n't give me a turn like that, do n't mind me if I talk nonsense, I'm—down on my luck. Let's get away from this place. Have you finished? My faith, I've a millstone about my neck!"

"Where to now?" I asked out in the street.

"Home!" said Mallory, "and come you with me, I've no taste for cafés to-night."

We walked all the way to the rue Boissonade in

silence. Mallory, it was quite plain, was in no mood for talk, and I'd no mind to disturb him.

They are quaint little studios, this row in the rue Boissonade. They sit back from the narrow street behind plots of grass and shrubbery, the whole shut in by high iron palings at the street side. They rise but two stories, gabled and picturesque, and the tiny loge of the concierge sits protectingly out to the fore by the common gate in the palings like an officer before his file of men. The studio that Mallory occupied he had taken, furnished, for a term of months from some man who was away in Algiers on a sketching tour. It was the ground floor, a little place hung about with Eastern draperies and altar cloths and such, and with the most amazing assortment of weapons—these of Mallory's contribution—that ranged from a Moorish rifle, some eight feet long, to several pairs of very serviceable foils and épées de combat, some sharpened, some with buttons. There was a divan under the great north light, a big steamer chair of osier, and numberless decorative artistic and highly uncomfortable benches, chairs and stools of carved wood.

Mallory made some lights and then dropped down upon the big divan with a sigh of weariness.

"I'm good company, eh Creighton, old chap?" said he.

"You're dashed poor company!" said I frankly. "What's got into you, man? Can't you tell a

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chap? I've never seen you like this. Out with it! open confession's good for the soul or something like that. It says so in the books."

"Confession?" sneered Mallory between the hands that held his head. "Confession, say you? Egad, should I start in confessing you'd die of horror—moreover 't would take a week's time. No, no, lad, I'll not make you a father confessor."

And then, though I did n't know how he'd take it, and was ready for a burst of rage, I went over and laid a hand on his bowed shoulder.

"Denis, old chap," said I, "I think I know how the land lies, and God knows I'm—well I'm sorry. It could n't be foreseen. It's nobody's fault, but it's none the less cruel for all that. Love's a queer thing, Denis. It won't be bidden nor it won't be coaxed. You may look for it a year and never find it, or, by the Lord, it may run fair into you when you turn the corner. Kill it, old chap, kill it! You must, or by heaven where shall we all be in a fortnight's time? Kill it! You've fought before, aye, and won too. You've got to win this time for all our sakes."

But he sprang to his feet past me and moved up and down the room, his lips tight and his hands strained to fists.

"And what if I do n't?" he cried. "What if I fight for myself this time? What if I chuck the rest of you over? Haven't I been fighting for

some other man all my life? What if I fight for myself this time?"

He paused an instant with one hand on the writing table that stood near, and his face changed, softened and smiled a bit under its frown. His eyes were wide and very far away.

"Fight for myself, and—win? Aye, lad, I believe I'd win—win. Think of it, think of it! Great God Almighty, what a life to come!" His voice strained and broke and he took up his march again through the room back and forth, his hands pressed over his face.

"I tell you, you can't know what I went through to-day in that garden yonder, playing the lowest, scurviest trick that ever was planned, upon the loveliest woman on God's wide earth! She's the one woman in all the world I could have loved for a lifetime, slaved for, starved for, worshipped as I've never worshipped my Maker! And there was I, lying to her, fast as my tongue could wag, telling her that it was honour kept me from her till now, honour, mind you, honour! Why I'd sold my last shreds of honour the night past for forty pound a month, sold myself to lie to her! What's to keep me, I say, from playing out the lie further than you'd planned when you bought me? You've left me no self-respect, what's to keep me from chucking you over?"

"Honour, Denis," said I, "that same honour that you never sold us, for no money has passed—you

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refused it this very day—the faith of a gentleman.”

“Gentleman, bah!” he cried, “a gentleman you would n’t give your hand to, last night, a gentleman good for nothing, a gentleman with an ill name, with a misspent youth behind him, a gentleman you picked at once to do a blackguardly trick for hire! What am I, to shy at scruples?”

“Yet you’ll shy at them,” said I.

He went to the little window at the rear of the studio, and let up the shade, and pushed out the swinging shutters. A cool breath of chestnut and lilac came up out of the gulf of darkness where the great trees stood arow, their tops laced against a starlit sky. Light shone yellow from the upper windows of the old convent beyond. The sound of a piano came very faintly down through the garden.

“She’s there where one of those lights shines,” said Mallory in a half whisper. “My lady’s there, God keep her, God bring her sweet sleep!”

He stood for a long time staring into the darkness, till I rose and moved about the room, filling and lighting a pipe and making myself comfortable. I think he had quite forgotten that I was there. Then at last he closed the shutters with a long sigh, and turned back into the room. His face was drawn and haggard. He stood a moment, irresolute, and then moved over to a cupboard in the wall, from which he took a bottle and some glasses

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and a carafe of water. It was an absinthe bottle, Pernod.

"Oh, I say, Denis," I cried. "Not that! You can't afford to fuddle your brain now. Think what we've to do in the next few days. Think of to-morrow, man! Besides, absinthe's no evening drink anyhow, it's an aperatif. Go easy!"

He poured out the liquor till the glass was half full, and added the water, but he gave me a quick side glance that said, "no interfering."

"Who are you, lad, to teach me the uses of Pernod?" said he, and drank. "The milk and water invalids who drink for an appetite don't know their drink. Eh, but I do, I do! It's the golden drink that charms away troubles. It's the cup o' life to lift a man out of pain!" He swallowed the remainder of the glass quickly and filled another.

"Eh, look at it, look at it!" he cried, fondly, turning goblet before his eyes, "molten opals, liquid fire! Saw ye ever such colour, lad?"

It was strange, how, as his tongue loosened, a faint brogue came to it, an Irish roll of which he'd scarcely a trace, sober.

"To-morrow, say you, Bobbie?"

"Ah, me beloved, fill the cup that clears
To-day of past Regrets an' future Fears:
To-morrow! Why To-morrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n thousand years."

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He filled another glass and his eyes brightened.

"Me little green devil that's a great green god!" said he, as if the shimmering liquor heard his voice. "Me little green devil that's a great green god, take me to paradise—lose me past regrets an' future fears. I'm weary o' problems an' fightin', an' heartache. Unravel me the Master-Knot o' Human Fate, little green devil! Find me the key to the door. I'm weary o'.searching.

" ' Heav'n but the vision o' fulfilled Desire,
And Hell the Shadow from a soul on fire ! "

Show me the vision, little green devil, to cool me bones, for I've been in hell with a soul on fire." He dropped his face into his hands upon the table and his shoulders heaved.

"In hell have I been for five years, little green devil," he muttered, "with a soul on fire and never a hand to pull me up—plenty of arms to push me down, round arms, white arms, soft arms—but never a hand to pull me out—till now! An' now 't is a hand I may n't take.

" ' Oh, Love—no Love! All the noise below Love,
Groanings all and moanings—none o' Life I lose!
All o' Life's a cry jnst o' weariness and woe, Love — "

Ah, little green devil take me to paradise ! "

His head rose with a jerk and his eyes met mine, blinked and sharpened to recognition—and he laughed.

"Heart's blood, but ye're a death's head!" he cried. "Ye think I'm drunk? Oh, Teddy, Teddy, that ye could suspect such of a friend! Drunk, say you, drunk? By the gods!"

He sprang up, a dare devil light in his eye, and pulled down from the wall a pair of foils with buttons and tossed me one across the table.

"You shall see if I'm drunk," he cried. "Defend yourself, man, defend yourself or, by my word, I'll run you through! Take up your foil, I say!" And he backed out into the middle of the room, flourishing his blade and upsetting chairs as he went. He was very, very drunk, but, drunk or sober, I knew his skill with the foils. There were few better swordsmen in Europe, as any maître d'armes in Paris would have told you. Drunk, there may have been a dozen who could best him, sober, I believe there were three. Two of them were—and are, famous Italians, and one an equally famous Frenchman.

"Guard yourself, man!" called Mallory, stamping with his free foot, and I fell into guard to humour him. His sword play was like flashes of lightning. I had scarce caught his eye, and made a half dozen instinctive parries, when there was a crash among the delft plates hung in a far corner. I stood agape, empty handed, and Mallory, hands on knees, swayed back and forth, roaring with laughter.

"Drunk!" he gasped between breaths, "drunk, eh? Oh, man, man, ye're a tailor! Ye're no

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swordsman! Disarmed like a recruit and ye fancy yerself at the foils!" He prodded me in the stomach with a playful point and roared again.

Then, quite suddenly, his foil clashed upon the floor and he caught his hands to his head, reeling toward a chair. I grasped him and guided him into the seat. His face had gone very white.

"I—I've got it—in the head—again Teddy!" he whispered, "got it in the—head—again!" He lay still for a few moments, eyes twitching spasmodically. "Sometimes it—comes," he said after a little, "a hard tight band—iron, I fancy—squeezes round your head—ye know, squeezes damnably, till your skull cracks—you can hear it! Sometimes, listen, man! sometimes we can't quite reach Heaven, the little green devil and I. There's a chap at the gate and he calls out 'who's there?' 'Mallory!' say I, 'Denis Mallory, a poor devil who's been in hell for five years, for pity let me in!' An' then sometimes, lad, he laughs and goes off. 'Wait till a hand leads ye here,' says he. An' we wander away, the little green devil and I, away 'tween worlds where it's cold grey dawn."

He reached for the glass and drank a swallow before I could snatch it from him.

"An' sometimes," he went on in his hoarse whisper, "sometimes I can't even get started. I sit here an' sip an' sip and wait, with me head goin' queerer an' queerer, an' the other end o' the room yonder, pulls out long like a camera, an' the ceilin'

an' the walls begin to come together, tryin' to squeeze me, tryin' their hardest, curse 'em! Someday they'll do it. Look, look! by Heaven they're at it now! Look, man, for God's sake! the ceilin' is bending down! It's tryin' to catch me!" He snatched the half-filled glass in his hand and hurled it across the room where it smashed against the wall. Then in an instant he had whipped up his foil from where it lay upon the floor and was in guard, eyes burning, teeth clenched, and breath that came in great gasps. He lunged fiercely with the foil and a chair went over with a crash. The foil snapped near the hilt, dropped from his hand and he fell back into my arms.

"Don't—let it—catch me, Teddy!" he gasped.
"If it catches me once—I'm done for."

CHAPTER VI

“**S**HOW Colonel von Altdorf in,” said Miss Jessica Mannering. Colonel von Altdorf, buttoned very tightly into his military looking frock coat, bowed profoundly from the doorway, and again over the hand that Miss Mannering extended to him.

“I’m glad you’re come,” said the young woman beaming upon him, “for I want to ask such a tremendous lot of questions!”

“My very dear Mademoiselle!” cried Colonel von Altdorf in unconcealed horror. “It is my profession to avoid answering questions.”

“But a woman’s questions, Colonel!” protested Miss Mannering.

“Ah!” said von Altdorf non-committally.

“They’re different, you know,” she concluded, nodding her small head.

“Ah!” said von Altdorf again and pulled at his grizzled moustache.

“Still,” proceeded the girl, “I suppose you have known a great many women in—in the course of your career, so that you’re accustomed to their questions.”

“I’ve met a few,” admitted von Altdorf, “and, yes, they’ve been fairly good at questions.”

"All sorts, of course," sighed Miss Mannering.

"The questions, Mademoiselle?"

"The women."

"Why, yes," said von Altdorf, smiling grimly.

"Why, yes, as you say, Mademoiselle, all sorts but each sort good at asking questions. I should say they differed but little."

"The women, Colonel?"

"The questions."

"Now first," began Miss Mannering, marking with a slim forefinger—Colonel von Altdorf sighed—"First, what are you going to do when the Prince arrives, the real Prince, I mean? Sir Gavin tells me that he will probably be here to-morrow."

"Why as to that, Mademoiselle," said von Altdorf, "if Fate deals us, meanwhile, no better card, or if chance shows us at the time no better way, we shall tell him the whole truth, show him that we took the only way, desperate though it was, to save Madame, and beg him to return to Novodnia without seeing her."

"And do you think he will do it?"

"Ah, that no man can tell. I have known Prince Karl from childhood, Mademoiselle, but I'll not guarantee what he may do at a crisis. He loves his wife, I believe."

The girl shook her head and sighed.

"Poor Prince!" said she gently. "Yes, I think he loves his wife, but she, Colonel, will never love

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the Prince. She did n't love him when she married him. She liked him, she was fond of him, somewhat, but love him? Ah no!"

"It was the title then?" asked Colonel von Altdorf.

"Why, yes, in a way," said the girl. "Yes, I suppose it was the title—but not to her, Colonel, to her people. They almost forced her into the marriage. Ah, yes, that can be done even in our free country, even in democratic America. Indeed it's done oftener than people think. She loved no other man, she liked the Prince, and I think he was honestly in love with her—can you wonder? So she married him."

"You said, Mademoiselle," observed von Altdorf, "you said, a moment ago, that Madame will never love the Prince. Yet wives have been known to come cold to the altar but waken to love as time passed."

The girl turned about on the swinging stool where she sat, and moved a hand up the keys of the grand piano that stood there, in soft little arpeggios. She frowned a bit as if she were puzzled, undecided.

"What did you mean, Mademoiselle?" said Colonel von Altdorf.

The girl turned again toward him. "I saw her face," said she, "when she came up through the garden with Mr. Mallory an hour ago, and said good-bye to him at the porch."

"Great God in heaven!" said Colonel von Altdorf under his breath.

"Last night," continued Miss Mannering, "after she had met him in the garden for the first time and spent an hour with him, she slept hardly at all, but tossed in her bed till past midnight, when she rose and put on a dressing gown and sat before the fire in her chamber. I found her there. She kept me beside her for an hour and would talk only of Mr. Mallory.

"'How I must have loved him, Jess!' she said. 'How I must have loved him, long ago, before it—it all happened, all this dreadful illness. He's so splendid, Jessica! so big and strong, and so tender and—dear! I didn't know princes ever were so. Don't you envy me, child? He wanted to come to me long ago, he starved to come to me, but he wouldn't because he was needed in his country. Ah, isn't that a man, Jess? He loved his honour and his duty more than he loved me. Isn't that a man to worship? Jess, Jess, I'm too happy to sleep—what time is it? One o'clock? One, two, three, eleven till noon, and three more, fourteen great hours, Jessica, till I shall see him again. Ah, child, have you seen his smile? Have you heard his voice when it's low and deep and tender?—fourteen hours! Give me something to make me sleep or I shall be counting the minutes.'

"That's how she talked through the night, Colonel. Do you wonder that I said she'd never love

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the real Prince? She's nervous still, you see, ah so very nervous, and far from strong, so that she feels things keenly, almost hysterically. She lets herself go as she would n't if she were well. Ah, Colonel von Altdorf, what's to be done when she finds out the truth, as find it out she must, of course, in time?"

Von Altdorf dropped a heavy hand upon his knee and sighed.

"Ask your questions of the good God, Mademoiselle," said he. "Who am I, that I should answer them? I've grown grey in the plots and schemes of diplomacy," he went on presently. "I've played strange hands in strange games, Mademoiselle, but whenever Fate sat down across the table and threw against me I was beaten. She's a queer lady, Fate. She takes strange freaks, and no man may say what she'll turn to next. I used to take a boy's delight in trying to thwart her, in matching my brains against her course, but as I grow old I know more and more that no man can beat or check her. She's taken our game out of our hands when we least looked for it. She'll play it to her own ends, and God have mercy on us all. We'll still do our best to avert catastrophe and to save unhappiness, but—— Fate plays the game, not we."

"But you'll not let the Prince see her?" cried Miss Mannering.

"Not I!" said von Altdorf stoutly, "not if it's

humanly possible to prevent it. Trust me for that. He sha'n't see her. Alas, Mademoiselle, it is of the false Prince I'm thinking."

"Ah, yes, yes!" she murmured, "Mr. Mallory! Oh, Colonel, I—I saw his face too when they came up from the garden! It was a tragedy. Tell me of him, Colonel von Altdorf. I think one would pin one's faith to him at the first look in his eyes."

"He is a gallant gentleman," said Colonel von Altdorf, "if I am a judge of men. Further than that I know little. He has had a varied and unhappy life, and he has certain things to struggle against even now. Alas, I fear we have given him, amongst us, a greater thing than all, against which to struggle — If only we'd foreseen that possibility! Our hopes and our fears, Mademoiselle, hang upon the shoulders of Denis Mallory."

"And they've been together again to-day," mused the girl.

"Aye, and will be to-morrow," cried von Altdorf. "In heaven's name, Mademoiselle, what of it? What if the lad does fall in love with her and she with him? She's another man's wife and that ends it! God knows I regret it all deeply enough. God knows it's a sad and cruel business, but it can't be helped, and when it's over, when she's well enough to be told the truth, they'll have to part, that's all."

"But what if love prove stronger than honour, Colonel?" said the girl, musingly as before. "What

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if Mr. Mallory—aye and the Princess too, when she knows the truth, find love the stronger? throw you over, leave you in the lurch?”

“Why, as for that, Mademoiselle,” said von Altdorf slowly, a bit awkwardly, “love has not come my way, often. Love and diplomacy have little in common, speak different languages—though on occasion, diplomacy must use love, of a sort, to gain its ends. It may be that there is love great enough to do what you say—— No, I’ll trust the lad! He’d never play us false, who put our faith in him. Suffer he may, and, I fear, must, but he’ll never throw us over, nor bring shame upon the lady he loves. He’ll remember that she’s another man’s wife—— Hark, what’s that?”

It was the Princess Eleanor singing in one of the rooms beyond. The voice grew louder as she came along the passage outside, and died away slowly as she mounted the stairs. She sang in a sweet, hushed voice, a happy little voice, tender and low, an old song of Lovelace’s:

“Yet this inconstancy is such
As thou too shalt adore,
I could not love thee, dear, so much
Loved I not honour more.”

“There’s your answer, Mademoiselle,” said Colonel von Altdorf rising to his feet, “and now I have the honour to bid you good-day.” He held her hand a moment, smiling down into her face half whimsically, half sadly.

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“We’re all fellow-conspirators,” said he, “and conspiracy’s a sorry business, even in a good cause. Your part must be with Madame. Watch over her, care for her as only a woman and an intimate can, and pray for the tangle to straighten itself. We’ll do our best, all of us, for her happiness. Maybe the thing will turn out well, after all. Fate’s a queer lady and plays strange games. She may play a stranger one here than we know of.”

CHAPTER VII

“**H**OW did you happen to want to marry me, Karl?” demanded the Princess Eleanor, athirst for information — It was the third day of their meeting.

“I saw you in a carriage, a victoria, driving in the park one day, the Central Park, is n’t it? In New York, you know.” He felt quite safe about these points now, for he had been painstakingly coached by the resourceful Miss Mannering.

“Why, but that,” objected the Princess wondering a little, “that’s no reason at all. Men do n’t want to marry girls just because they’ve seen them once on the street.”

“Oh, do n’t they, though!” cried Denis Mallory. “Well, maybe they do n’t, ordinary girls. I never wanted to marry any other girl because I’d seen her once at a distance. But you’re so absurdly different, you know.”

“I’m not,” declared the Princess with a certain lack of conviction, a certain obvious willingness to be disputed. “Am I?” she added encouragingly, “how?”

Mallory waited till she raised her head and her eyes met his. It always gave him a little shock, a quick catching of the breath, to meet her eyes.

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"You're the most unspeakably beautiful thing that God ever dreamed of and made on the waking," said he. "You're flowers and music and the thrill of love made human, shut into one sweet body. Ah, my lady, you're the break o' day to a soul that's been shivering in the dark! Different from other women? Are there other women? I suppose so, but I've not seen them or heard them or thought of them since I met you. I've seen nothing but your eyes and your smile and all the perfect loveliness of you, night and day. And I've heard nothing but your voice from morning till morning. It's in my ears always like the lilt of an old sweet song. And I've thought of nothing but you till my mind will grasp no other thing, till my brain's a mere machine that throws pictures of you before me without rest, waking or sleeping. Different from other women? O, my lady, my lady!"

The Princess Eleanor's face was hidden in her hands. Her little ears and her neck were crimson as the long wrap that she wore.

"Ah, you're a goddess, my lady, come down from—somewhere to make a god of a very worthless and undeserving young chap. A goddess with a goddess's eyes and bearing, but oh, a woman's smile and a woman's blush! such a very human goddess, Eleanor, that one must worship, but that one is n't afraid of! It's woman as much as goddess, my lady, and oh my heart is in the dust under her feet!"

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"Ah, not goddess, Karl, not goddess!" cried the Princess Eleanor through the hands that covered her face, "just a woman! such a very human woman like other women! Just a girl who—who feels her heart throb and tremble when you tell her she's beautiful, just a girl who's starving for one man's love."

But young Mallory gripped the edge of the old stone seat with straining fingers and forced back the words that rushed to his lips.

"Great God, what have I done?" he cried inwardly, aghast at his own outbreak, "broken faith with them all! and they trusted me! Oh, you blackguard! you blackguard! Is there anything you won't fall to? And I'd sworn to myself never to let it come to that, never to say a word of outright love to her. Ah, you blackguard! Squirm out of it now if you can."

He turned about to the girl shaking his head sadly.

"Forgive me, Eleanor," said he, "I—I've broken faith with you in a sort of way, have n't I? I was to give you time, not to press you. I was to let you come gradually to know me, care for me—if you could. And here am I making desperate love to you almost in the beginning! It is n't easy not to make love to you, my lady. Forgive me! I won't do it again—soon."

The Princess Eleanor smiled to him adorably through wet lashes, and Mallory clung to the edge of the old stone seat.

"Ah, yes, yes, Carlo," she breathed, "give me a little time. A girl shrinks from her surrender, even when—when she aches to make the surrender. It's a girl's queer nature to be so. Don't make me tell you that I—love you, yet, even if I want to. Give me time, Karl, time for my love dreams, for my girl's fears and qualms and imaginings. Don't take me too quickly by storm for I'm wofully weak, my Prince, and I'd be in your arms in a moment. Come, we must walk, we've sat still too long. Hook the cape for me at my throat, Carlo,—ah, no, no perhaps—perhaps you'd better—not. I'll hook it, so! Now, come! There won't be many lilacs to fall in my hair to-day. See, they're nearly gone. Ah, but the chestnuts are a heaven of sweet odours! Is n't our garden beautiful, mon Prince? Is n't it perfect?" She threw out her arms to the golden sunshine and her eyes closed.

"It's a perfect world, Carlo mio! It's all sunshine and love and sweet odours! And the shadows are past and gone. Oh, my Prince, it's good to be alive!"

She moved over to the little gravel path that ran under the wall, and Mallory followed her. She sang under her breath as she walked, a little old song, very sweet and low. It was

"Yet this inconstancy is such
As thou too shalt adore."

Her face was flushed and softly smiling, rosy

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with happiness, and her blue eyes were half closed.

"Tell me, Karl," said she, after a time, "how is it that you speak such perfect English? I've known many Europeans who spoke it well, even idiomatically, but there's always a little difference, a little quality one can't describe, that makes it foreign. You'd know it wasn't their native tongue. You speak it as if you had been born to it."

"Oh, as for that," said Mallory, "I've always spoken English. I was taught it from the cradle. You see my mother was part English. Faith, I can speak it with an Irish brogue, if you like. Oh, my English is as natural to me as yours—and for once," he added inwardly, "that's no lie.—You don't know half my accomplishments," he went on aloud. "I can do no end of things that would surprise you, really they would. I used to write for the newspapers—before I came to the throne, you know—money was at times a bit scarce in those days. Ah, beautiful things I wrote!"

"Poetry?" cried the Princess Eleanor eagerly.

"No, not poetry, heaven forbid!"

"Ah, but you can, I know!" she insisted. "I know you can. Carlo mio—will you write me a poem? Just the littlest bit of a one! There was a man, oh ages ago, who wrote poems to me. They were so silly! *Please*, will you write me a poem, Carlo, if I'll be very, very good?—All about me, you know! See what a vain little cat I am!"

"I will not," said Mallory with decision. "I will put on a little red jacket and a collar with a chain and be dragged about the streets after a hand-organ if that would amuse you, or I'll climb trees or stand on my head, but I'll write no poems for anybody. There are depths to which I have n't yet sunk—though upon my word I had n't suspected them."

The Princess sighed wistfully.

"I should have liked a poem," she grieved, "still, if you won't do a little thing like that for me I suppose I shall have to go without it."

She turned to him with a soft laugh of infinite content, of joy and happiness. She put up her two hands clasped upon his breast, leaning upon him, smiling into his eyes.

"Ah, you sha' n't be teased!" she cried. "Men hate poetry, do n't they? Great, big, strong fighting men like you. You sha' n't be teased, my Prince, I'm going to be nice to you, *very* nice."

They were standing under the little window in the studio wall. There came suddenly, from above, the sound of voices, quick, hoarse exclamations, and movements as of a struggle. Then all at once, a man burst through the white curtains, and poised an instant, one leg over the window ledge, and sprang to the ground before them, half falling as he leaped, so that he sprawled upon the black earth on hands and knees.

He was on his feet and facing them in a moment.

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He was a rather small man, under medium height, swarthy of complexion, and with very black hair. He had large and dark eyes, and a fierce little moustache that turned up sharply at the ends.

The man's breast heaved with a stormy breathing that checked his utterance. His face was flushed, and his hands shook with rage. He seemed scarcely to look at the Princess Eleanor but fixed his eyes upon young Denis Mallory in a glare so savage that the Irishman instinctively drew back a pace, thrusting the girl behind him, so that his body sheltered her.

"Well?" said he in a puzzled tone, "well? what is it?" Then, all in a flash, the truth burst upon him.

"You—you blackguard!" cried the man thickly, "you dog!—you thief!" He spoke in French and his rage was so great that his tongue would only with difficulty form the sounds. It was as if he wrenched each word from his breast with a visible effort.

"You—you wolf in the fold!" he cried, "you shall pay for—this, curse you, with your—life!" He waved his arm helplessly and leaned back against the stone wall, panting.

The Princess Eleanor made a tottering step forward, holding by Mallory's arm with both her hands. Her face was very white, and she stared at the man before her with wide burning eyes and parted lips.

"Carlo, Carlo!" she cried in a half whisper, "who is—that man? What does—he—want? It's so—so strange! I seem to have—to have seen him before—somewhere—— His face is—— Why let me think!—It's all so strange! I *must* have seen him before—what does he want, Karl? Who is he?"

Mallory drew the girl back once more, very gently, till she stood behind him, and his left arm held her about the shoulders. His face had gone a bit pale and his jaw very firm and set. He never took his eyes from those of the short, swarthy man by the wall. They gleamed steadily under drawn brows. I should not have cared to face Denis just then.

"This man, Eleanor," said he slowly, in a cold hard voice that bore a threat, "this man is a very rash and foolish person whom I—and others, have tried to do a service—a service," he repeated, still looking steadily into the other's eyes. "But he is so foolish and headstrong as to wish to do me a harm in return—so ungrateful and so cowardly as to be willing to bring great risk to those whom he pretends to—love, all for a childish spite." He shook his head—eyes never moving—and his arm tightened a bit about her shoulders, drew her closer. "But he'll not be allowed to bring harm to them, Eleanor. They shall be protected at any cost—of his life or of mine.—That's all you need know. And now I must take you back to the

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house. This—man must be dealt with at once. Come, Eleanor.”

The swarthy man by the wall raised one hand in a queer little helpless gesture and his head drooped.

Mallory drew the girl away, and they moved up the gravel path toward the house. She clung still to his arm and her eyes were troubled, puzzled and anxious.

“You’ll not let him harm you, Karl?” she begged softly. “He looked so desperate, so furiously angry! You’ll not let him harm you, my Prince?”

“No, Eleanor,” said he laughing a little. “Why no! What? harm the Prince of Novodnia? No, no harm shall come to the Prince of Novodnia, my dear. Be certain of that—— Go in now. You shall hear soon that all’s well.”

He bent over her hand and held it an instant to his cheek, kissed the long slim fingers and the pink palm.

The Princess Eleanor caught the hand to her breast with a little low cry. Her cheeks flamed suddenly.

“Au revoir, Carlo,” she whispered. “Not good-bye, ah, not good-bye—— It’s only till to-morrow. Au revoir, Carlo mio!” She moved back under the porch and through the door, but her eyes were upon him till the door closed.

Young Mallory gave his head a little jerk, and pressed his hands a moment over his eyes, then he

turned and went quietly down through the garden to the high studio wall.

The Prince of Novodnia stood in his place there, his brows lowering, his hands playing at the buttons of his jacket. I was in the window above, half concealed with the curtains.

"Well, sir?" said Denis Mallory, and came to a halt before the Prince.

Karl of Novodnia stared at him sullenly. His mouth worked under the fierce black moustache.

"It is not for me to judge you, sir," said the Irishman coldly, "but you show your affection and your care for your—for the Princess in strange ways. You may thank Heaven, or whom you please, that the princess has been spared a shock that might well have been fatal. You know the reasons why I am here playing a part. You know why it is necessary, yet you attempt deliberately to wreck all our hopes and plans and efforts that are made in your behalf as well as hers."

"'Efforts in my behalf'!" sneered the Prince bitterly. "Aye fine talk, Monsieur le Chevalier Bayard! fine talk, Monsieur the thief, Monsieur the sneak in another's home! You and your noble efforts! I tell you, Monsieur!" he cried, shaking a clenched hand, "I tell you you are sneaking behind your fine pretensions to steal the love of my wife, of the Princess Eleanor of Novodnia! I saw you, you blackguard! I saw her put her two hands upon your breast and look up into your damned

face! Do you think I do n't know a love look when I see it? You're plotting to steal my wife from me, you cur, you and the whole parcel of thieves here, among you! But there'll be one less for I'll have your life, by the love of God, here and now! Above there! Weapons! Do you hear? Weapons, I say! Curse you, you beast, do you want me to kill you with my hands?"

Mallory smiled. The probability of his death at the naked hands of the raving little man before him seemed not alarming. Yet his eyes were set and hard, a bit narrowed. He was fond of calling himself ill names, of imputing to his motives a baseness that was far from their due, but he relished little this sort of thing from another.

He looked up to the window and met my eyes. He gave a little shrug of helplessness and shook his head.

"I'll not fight with you, sir," said he to the Prince. "You're needed elsewhere, I'm told. Your life must n't be risked."

The Novodnian made as if he would spring upon him with empty hands.

"You cur! You cur!" he snarled furiously. "A coward too, eh? Brave enough to sneak into a man's house and steal his wife but too cowardly to face steel! You cur!"

"Teddy," said Denis Mallory quietly, his eyes steady and hard upon the other man's, "will you be good enough to throw me down a pair of sharpened foils?"

But I leaned from the window panic-stricken.

"For God's sake, Denis!" I cried. "You mustn't, you mustn't! Think what you're doing, man! Oh, have a care!" Denis glanced up at me for an instant and smiled.

"It's all right, lad," said he. "Never fear! Come, the foils! and be quick!"

I took down the foils from the wall near at hand, and tossed them to him. Both men had taken off jackets and waistcoats, and they took their blades and went to work in an instant, Denis quietly and wholly on the defensive, the Prince with a mad fury that made me fear for a moment lest he break down that matchless guard.

At the clash of the blades, von Altdorf came running across the studio. He had been conferring with MacKenzie in a far corner and had not seen me fetch the swords.

"What are they doing?" he cried, as he ran, "fighting, fighting? For God's sake, Creighton, why don't you stop them? Sir, sir!" He had one foot over the window ledge when I hauled him back into the room.

"Hush, man!" I cried into his ear. "Hush, you'll put them out! Denis won't hurt the Prince and the Prince can't hurt Denis. He *would* fight! He's mad with rage. He was all for tearing Denis with his empty hands. Be still, there'll be no harm done!"

It was one of the most beautiful exhibitions of

swordsmanship that I have ever seen, Mallory's wonderful and impregnable defence against an attack which was a very whirlwind of fierceness and intensity. Aye, and a skilful whirlwind too, not all random slashing. The Prince was a fine swordsman and his rage gave him a strength and endurance far beyond his ordinary form.

But even this strength and endurance could not last forever against such a blade. His thrusts grew weaker and his breathing more laboured, till he drew off a moment and stood bent and trembling, his point resting upon the ground, and his gaze fixed in baffled hatred upon the young Irishman.

It was at just this moment, while he stood waiting, tall, slender, strong and ready, his head reared as we grew to know it so well in times of stress, point resting lightly upon the ground near his feet, left hand upon hip; it was at this moment that I saw—and I think von Altdorf saw it too—a strange look come upon Mallory's face, an uncertainty, a problem. It was as if he put himself a question, and demanded its answer. Here was he in a quarrel not of his seeking, driven to it by insults the grossest possible, and facing the one man of all the world who stood in the way of what his heart craved. Here was a way out of his difficulties, everything made easy. The giving up of all that was dear to him in the world, that he had thought inevitable, need not be done. Here was a way easy and sure. He need n't even thrust. He need n't

do the thing himself. A parry with the point held firm, not brought back en garde, and the man's own lunge must spit him—so easy as that—and Eleanor in the house yonder!

I think both von Altdorf and I read his thoughts as though they were a printed page. I felt von Altdorf's hand upon my shoulder. It trembled a little. Then the look passed from Mallory's face as swiftly as it had come. He gave his head a little shake and smiled once more. He even glanced up to the window, where the two of us leaned far out, watching with fascinated eyes, and gave us a humorous wink.

It was like Denis. Tragedy and comedy ran ever side by side in his nature, and he found fun in the darkest of dangers.

The Prince attacked once more, furiously, with a sort of desperate madness as if he knew himself overmatched but sought by the very storm of his onslaught to beat down that steel wall. But he met with another reception this time, for Denis who had been content, before, merely to keep his body from hurt, now took the offensive and pressed the other into defence, pressed him till he broke ground, till he retreated step by step, and at last his left heel touched the wall. We who sat near, just over their heads, saw the perspiration break out upon the Prince's forehead and trickle down his nose and cheeks.

Then began the marvellous part of it, for Denis,

quiet, cool, steady as a machine, began to break through the other's guard, at will. His blade flashed too swiftly for sight to follow. To us above it had the appearance of being in a dozen places at once, a dozen glittering lines with the afternoon sun shining upon its length, as the spokes of a rapidly moving wheel seem blended to the eye in a fan of quivering light.

He made none of those silly and unnecessary motions, those stampings and outcries and wavings of the arm to which the Italians and even the French hold. He fought with the least movement possible, knees bent no more than need be, wrist free and swifter than lightning, eyes calm, steady and fixed unwaveringly upon those of his opponent, never upon the blades.

I say he broke through the Prince's guard at will, touched him here and there, so lightly as not to scratch the skin, nor tear the garment, but always to be felt, always to make the man realise that he could run him through in an instant if he wished it. Breast, arm, shoulder, even cheek, he touched him, and the Prince cursed with the little breath he had left, cursed and sobbed with rage, for now he knew that the man would not kill or even wound him, unless, perchance, he was biding his time and meant to finish the game at his leisure. He knew that he was being played with, wearied out at the other's mercy, shamed before us all. Already his wrist burned as if with fire, and his arm near the

shoulder ached till it was numb. His sword played still in a sort of mechanical desperation, but there was no cunning nor strength in it. Then, while his brain swam dizzily and the garden before his eyes wheeled and swung as in a fever, he heard Mr. Mallory say sharply, as if from a great distance,

"Come, sir, are you satisfied? Enough of this farce!" And suddenly the foil seemed to leap from his hand as by a strength of its own, leap high in the air over his head and wheel against the sky till it fell at a little distance, striking, point downward, in the black earth, and quivered there upright.

Then he dropped back helplessly against the wall, blind, aching and crushed, and the tears coursed down his cheeks and dripped from his chin. He would have slipped to the ground but that Denis Mallory sprang forward, dropping his foil, and threw his long arms about him, lifting him in them as if he had been a child. When he wakened to consciousness he was lying upon the big divan in the studio.

CHAPTER VIII

COLONEL VON ALTDORF was holding his head with one arm and forcing brandy from a little glass between his teeth. Young Mallory sat upon the edge of the divan, holding one of the limp hands and chafing it between his own. MacKenzie and I hovered near with anxious faces.

The Prince lay silent for a long time after his senses had come to him again, eyes closed and limbs motionless. Then at last he rose, a bit unsteadily, to his feet, and went to the window that overlooked the garden, where he stood gazing out upon the trees, again for a long time. He had raised a protesting hand when von Altdorf would have spoken, so that we all stood silent, waiting.

When he turned back into the room there was no more passion to be seen upon his face, no more of the furious tempest of rage that had so lately shaken him. His head drooped and the flush in his cheeks seemed of honest shame.

He went over to young Denis Mallory and held out his hand.

"I did you a great wrong, sir," said the Prince in a low voice. "I put a shameful insult upon you, and though you might have killed me in the fight I

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forced, you would not. You have shamed me more than any man. I ask your pardon and your hand. I wronged you."

"Why, sir!" cried Denis Mallory, his own face flushing crimson. "Why, sir, you unman me! I should not have fought at all, for no man may be held accountable for his words when anger carries him beyond reason. You more than make amends, sir."

The Prince dropped upon a chair beside the table and leaned his head upon one hand. He seemed still weary and faint with exhaustion.

"I owe you gentlemen all," said he, "a debt I can never repay for your care of the person and health of the Princess Eleanor. From Sir Gavin MacKenzie and from von Altdorf, here, I had a right to expect all they could perform, but as for you two gentlemen, M. Mallory and M. Creighton upon whom I had no least claim, I cannot express my obligation. Your plan was no doubt the best one that could be made. It is a pity, now that I am so soon in Paris, that it was put into effect, for it was a desperate makeshift that will require desperate remedies and a terrible shock to Madame, but you could not have known I was coming."

"Ah, why did you come, sir?" groaned von Altdorf. "Why did you come? It was madness to leave the country at such a time! Aren't those dogs waiting with their tongues out, to snap at your seat, once you're out of it? Isn't Georgias

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sleeping with his clothes on up in the hills over Novodni, waiting to gobble the city? And has n't he a rabble of bandit swine to back him? Ah, sir, it was madness to come here now!"

The Prince shook his head at him with a little whimsical smile.

"You're a hard taskmaster, von Altdorf," said he, "hard as Fate, and by my faith, I'm weary of that lady. She drives, von Altdorf, she never beguiles. Man, man, am I to be all Prince and never husband? Am I a machine, Colonel? Shall I love a throne better than my wife who's in danger?"

Von Altdorf pulled at his moustache.

"I was n't thinking of you, sir, nor of what you love," said he bluntly. "I was thinking of Novodnia. I served your father, sir, and I serve you. I'm ready to do your will at my life's cost, but your will against your welfare and the welfare of your house I'll oppose with all my strength. No Pavelovitch, no Russian cat's paw, shall sit in Novodni if I can prevent it. I serve the Prince, sir, not the man, when the two go separate ways."

"A hard taskmaster," said the Prince, smiling still, a bit sadly, "hard as Fate. You've brains where your heart should be, von Altdorf."

"I've loyalty to my country there," growled von Altdorf. "And look you, sir, we've a question to face—or shall have soon, now that Madame is assured of recovery, and must soon be told that she is your wife. What's to be done?"

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"Why, seat her by my side in Novodni! What else?" said the Prince.

"You know the popular attitude in Novodnia toward that, sir," observed von Altdorf. "Is your seat so firm under you that you can afford to alienate your own supporters? Would Georgias have no move to make, with a commoner—albeit the loveliest woman alive—in the Palace at Novodni? Her son could n't reign, sir."

"Now by heaven!" cried Prince Karl, "we'll not fight this matter all over again! Princess in fact she shall be as well as in name. As for public opinion, damn public opinion! God above, von Altdorf, has there been no Draga Maschin? Has there been no Katia Petrofski? Novodnia is not the German Empire, man, nor the Kingdom of Italy! Who cares whence came a Balkan Princess? whether she was a king's daughter or a peasant's?"

"It's never been the custom of your house to marry save in royal circles," said von Altdorf. "Your mother was no peasant's daughter, my Prince. I give you my word that if you attempt to seat Madame beside you, your son will never reign in Novodnia, but a Pavelovitch will take the throne that your fathers have held for a century, upon your death, if not before—a short time before."

The Prince dropped his face into his hands and covered his ears.

"Will you have done, man!" he groaned. "Don't I know all you say? Haven't I spent sleepless nights without end over it? Let be, let be, von Altdorf! I can't bear it now. Wait till it faces us! Give me time to think. Great God, was ever a man so beset?"

"But one thing more, sir," persisted von Altdorf, "an important thing. It is too much to hope that you were not, or at least will not be, followed here. Those devils are too clever to miss the chance. Georgias is out of it, of course, for he's in the mountains somewhere about Makarin, but his arch cutthroat, von Steinbrücke, is always in the capital, spying about. He'd know you were gone in the course of a day or so, even if he did n't constantly keep you shadowed, as is most probable, and he'd be off here or send some one with a band of their men, at once. Keep indoors, sir, as much as possible. Never go abroad without some of us with you, and never go abroad at all in the night. Think of a bit of news from Paris that would most please Georgias, and would set him—you know where."

The Prince settled back in his chair and dropped his hands wearily into his lap.

"I am in your hands, gentlemen," said he in a tired, overwrought voice. "Do as you will. One thing only I insist upon. I am here in Paris, wisely or foolishly, as you like, and here I stay till I have seen my wife and made myself known to her, till

we have come to an understanding. I shall not go back to Novodnia till all this mystery and uncertainty is cleared away, till I know that the Princess Eleanor will follow me when she is able."

"But that, sir ——" cried old MacKenzie, and bit his words sharply in two when von Altdorf raised a warning hand.

"Why then, with that we must be content," said von Altdorf, "save that the Princess Eleanor is in no state to be told the truth or to receive you at present, sir. We must wait, and guard your person meantime with all care—God send no ill fall upon Novodnia while you are absent."

Denis Mallory had been standing by the window that looked out over the grass plot and shrubbery to the narrow little rue Boissonade. He was screened from without by the white lace curtains that hung before the window.

He turned and beckoned with his eyes to Colonel von Altdorf, who, after a moment, yawned and strolled nonchalantly across the room.

"There's a pair of shabby looking chaps have been loitering about in front of the studio for half an hour," whispered Mallory. "They're gotten up to look like Italian models out of work, but I don't think they're models unless they're newcomers. I've never seen them before. They act peculiar."

Von Altdorf peered through the window and waited till the faces of the two men came into view. Then his own face went suddenly crimson with

the effort to keep down the cry that rose to his lips.

"By heaven, I said they'd come!" he whispered. "One of them's Baron von Steinbrücke and the other is a rascal in his pay. Von Steinbrücke, eh? The villain's after big game or he'd never come himself. He'd send others. He's a renegade Austrian driven out of Vienna by card scandals and attempts at blackmail against some of the court set, and he's George's right hand—worth two of George at that, blackguard though he is. But they must be driven off, somehow, before the Prince leaves the house. Creighton, man, come here a moment."

I went over to the window and von Altdorf told me briefly what he had just told Denis.

"I think they'll be off if any one goes out," said he. "Do you try it. They mustn't see the Prince."

I took my hat and stick and went out into the porch and slowly down the path to the high iron fence and the little loge of the concierge. The two loafers outside moved a short distance away and watched. It seemed that they were not easily to be frightened off. I went into the loge and brought the concierge out from the preparation of her dinner, a fat, gray-haired and merry old woman with a cheery word for every one.

I pointed out the two men in the street, taking good care that they should see me doing it, and told her that M. Mallory believed them to be certain

thieves who had robbed a friend of his some time since, and were no doubt meditating an attack in the rue Boissonade. This, the concierge opined, grimly, would be made difficult, not to say disagreeable, for them, so long as she retained her health and strength. She retreated to the loge shaking her great wooden spoon threateningly, and muttering to herself.

"Herr von Steinbrücke and friend won't have precisely an easy time of it, spying about here," said I as I went out into the impasse.

The two men moved off ahead of me toward the Boulevard Raspail, glancing back over their shoulders sullenly enough, every moment or two. At the Boulevard they suddenly hailed a passing fiacre, and jumping into it, went off down the street at a great pace. I was after them immediately in another cab, not that there was anything to be gained by following them, but because I was in a mood to give them a fright and teach them a lesson. Moreover, I wished to leave them as far as possible from the rue Boissonade.

They turned at the Boulevard Montparnasse, and drove at a gallop toward the gare, then down the rue de Rennes to the Boulevard St. Germain and so to the Place de la Concorde across the river.

Here, in a great throng of vehicles, so thick that they could not have distinguished mine, I bade my cabby turn round, and drove back laughing to the rue Boissonade.

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"Egad!" said I. "They'll be in a panic at every fiacre that comes up behind them for the next hour. They'll be all over Paris before they dare stop."

CHAPTER IX

“**W**HY yes, of course,” said Miss Jessica Mannering. “Show Colonel von Altdorf in at once.”

“I seem,” said Colonel von Altdorf to a small, slender and very white hand, “I seem to have fallen into the habit of coming here.”

“It’s never too late,” observed the hand’s proprietor sagely, “to form good habits. Besides——” she puckered her brows in meditation and counted upon the fingers of that same hand.

“You’ve been here but three times before,” she announced.

“Three?” he questioned. “I should have thought it was many more, do you know.”

“Thank you,” said Miss Mannering haughtily.

“Dear me,” murmured Colonel von Altdorf, blinking placidly. “I seem to have said something unfortunate. You look annoyed. Whatever it was I’m sorry for it, Mademoiselle. Alas, I’m unused to the society of ladies. I don’t know what to say to please them. They’re strange things, Mademoiselle, passing strange, and sweet, upon my faith, passing sweet. Still I don’t know what to say to please them.”

"And you a diplomatist!" sniffed Miss Mannering.

"That, Mademoiselle, is my misfortune, not my fault," protested von Altdorf sadly. "I was put into the profession while still very young, by a misguided parent.

"Do you know?" he continued presently, "it is in my mind that I came here for a purpose, to discuss something of importance, but upon my word, the thing has quite gone from me. I don't know what it could have been. Perhaps there wasn't anything at all."

"Why perhaps, perhaps!" cried the girl with dramatic astonishment, "perhaps you came just to see me! Fancy!"

"That," said Colonel von Altdorf, tugging at his moustache, "is quite possible. I wonder it had n't occurred to me before. Are all American young women brilliant, Mademoiselle—as well as beautiful?"

"All of them," nodded the truthful Miss Mannering gravely, "all brilliant and all very, very beautiful. You should visit America, Colonel."

"Alas, Mademoiselle," protested von Altdorf, "if one of them, and only a little one at that, is sufficient to upset my peace of mind what should I do among so many? A man loves his peace of mind at two and forty, Mademoiselle."

Miss Mannering did not dispute it. She looked

at the rug. It was a very good sort of rug, as rugs go.

"How is the Princess?" enquired Colonel von Altdorf presently.

"She's living in a bubble of happiness, a Spanish Castle of joy," said the girl. "Alas, she doesn't know the bubble must burst and the castle tumble about her ears. She thinks she's on the threshold of a heaven that will last her life long. Ah, what a cruel trick it was, Colonel von Altdorf!"

"Necessity is always cruel, Mademoiselle," said the diplomat. "Happiness is usually a bubble, and joy a *château en Espagne*. And, as every one knows, bubbles must burst and air castles fade away."

"She was greatly shocked when the Prince burst into the garden the other day," pursued Miss Manering. "She can't get over the feeling that she has known him or seen him somewhere before, that he has played some part in her life—indeed it's far from strange! Sir Gavin calls it by some long and dreadful name, the partial recollection. He was quite excited over it."

"But she's better in a general way? She's stronger?" asked von Altdorf.

"Oh, infinitely better! She's almost her old self again. The colour is back in her cheeks, and the roundness to her neck—she's gained wonderfully in weight. Ah, yes, she's almost as strong as ever, now, just in these few days, and all be-

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cause she's happy. Oh, Mr. Creighton told me of Mr. Mallory's duel with the Prince in the garden the other day. It must have been wonderful."

"He's the most marvellous swordsman I ever saw," said von Altdorf warmly. "He was born to it. No man, even with the career that Denis has had, could acquire such skill by practice only. It's beyond words."

"And he might have killed the Prince—and made his own way easy," mused the girl. "Mr. Creighton told me that for one little moment he thought it would happen."

"Yes," said von Altdorf, "for one little moment I thought so too. No man is above temptation. We saw him tempted, and by Heaven, we saw him put temptation away as few men could have done. But as for that there are few men like him. I'll tell you something I saw yesterday. I was in his studio waiting for him to come up from the garden where he walked with the Princess. I sat in a big deep chair that stands in a rather dark corner, and sitting there grew drowsy a bit so that I didn't hear Denis when he entered. The first I knew he was standing in the middle of the room, in the light from the big north windows, and while I live, Mademoiselle, I hope never again to see upon a man's face such a look of hopeless agony, such a struggle of the greatest love a man can own, with the call of honour that means renunciation. His soul was in his face, Mademoiselle, there in that

moment when he thought himself alone, and it was a soul that had been led to Heaven's gate and shown what was within, only to be hurled deep into hell.

"He threw himself, face downward, upon the big divan that stands in a corner of the room, and lay there with his hands over his eyes, and his shoulders twisting from time to time.

"I dared not move, show myself, for his own sake, and I could n't get away without his hearing.

"Then, after a time, he rose to his feet and went across the room to a little cupboard in the wall, which he opened. He took out a bottle, an absinthe bottle, and glasses and a carafe of water, and filled one of the glasses, sitting at a table. He faced the light again so that I could see the struggle in his face.

"Mademoiselle, you who are a woman carefully bred, delicately nurtured, can know nothing, appreciate nothing, of such a struggle, the struggle of racked and quivering nerves for the relief that lies before them, of a will weakened by battle, of a mind ravaged by a passion that it knows is hopeless.

"I say he sat a long time with the full glass in his hand, head bent a bit over it, every nerve in his body, as I knew well, shrieking for the rest, the calm, the ease, that a few glasses of that liquor would give them.

"Then all at once he gave his head a little jerk and tore his fingers from the glass with an effort.

“‘No!’ he cried, quite aloud. ‘No, by God, no!’ And he went over to the divan again and threw himself face down there and lay still. I crept out after a time very softly. I don’t think he heard me, perhaps—indeed I hope, he was even asleep. But my heart bled for him, Mademoiselle. He is a man!”

“Poor Mr. Mallory!” cried the girl softly. “Ah, poor Mr. Mallory! My heart bleeds for him too, Colonel. What will become of him—when it’s all over? Some lives seem marked for tragedy, don’t they? His life has been a tragedy, heaven knows, young as he is, and it seems as if it must be a crueler one still. Have you seen anything more of those men who came to spy upon the Prince?”

Von Altdorf shook his head.

“Nothing since Creighton gave them such a chase, a week ago,” said he. “We’re keeping the closest guard upon the Prince. He never stirs out without one or two of us with him. They’ll have to be bold indeed to reach him. Still I sha’n’t rest easy till the Prince is back again in Novodnia where he belongs. Every moment of his stay here is keenest danger to himself and to the state, but stay he will till he’s seen the Princess, and that MacKenzie won’t yet allow. In all good faith I think it were best over with as soon as may be. She’s strong again, and every day that passes leaves her deeper and deeper in love with Mr. Mallory, and he with her. Let ’em have done with

it, I say. Shock it will be, but as well a shock now as ever."

"Yet we all shrink from the point," said the girl, shaking her head anxiously, "even Sir Gavin. It was easy to enter upon the trick, easy to say that some time, some time in the indefinite future, the truth must be told, the matter cleared up, but when the time comes near, truth-telling seems difficult, Colonel. One realises what one has undertaken and shrinks from what may follow. It won't be an easy thing to do."

"Yet it must be done," said Colonel von Altdorf. "Ah, well, Mademoiselle, it's Fate that plays, not we, and it will help no one that we sit here sighing and shaking our heads. Come, will you play for me upon the piano yonder? I hear you playing sometimes when I'm in the garden or even so far as in the studio, and I love music. Perhaps you would sing also?"

"What shall I sing of?" asked the girl running a hand up and down the keys softly. "Of war and such?—'arms and the man'? Your life has been full of warfare."

"Why," said Colonel von Altdorf leaning upon the piano with his folded arms, "why, of anything you will—still I've no mind for warfare to-day, Mademoiselle. Sing rather of—of peace and—love, and all such."

"Of peace and—love and all such'?" murmured the girl. "Are peace and—love so inseparable

then, sir? Must one think of them together? Does love mean peace?"

"Why, no," said Colonel von Altdorf. "No, Mademoiselle, love does n't always mean peace, I fear. Alas, sometimes it means a sad tumult in the heart, a lying awake o' nights, a most perverse restlessness of spirit. Peace? No, love is warfare after all. Still—sing to me of love, Mademoiselle!"

"Yet you said the other day," persisted the girl, her head bent over the keys and her hands wandering slowly through some sweet air, "you said that love had n't—had n't come your way, Colonel."

"It's never too late," said Colonel von Altdorf, "to form good habits. I have it on the best of authority. Love may come even at two and forty—even when one's poll is grizzled and one clings to one's peace of mind. Sing to me of love, Mademoiselle."

She played a little *prélude*, and sang,

"Out upon it : I have loved
Three whole days together ;
And am like to love three more,
If it prove fine weather."

"Ah, Mademoiselle!" cried Colonel von Altdorf. "Do I deserve that? Can you not be kinder?"

And she sang, very sweet and low, "Love in my bosom like a bee——"

Colonel von Altdorf stood by the piano for a long

time after she had finished, silent and moody. Then at last he sighed and took up his hat.

“This love, Mademoiselle,” said he, “is a strange thing, strange as Fate. I’ve wondered at it and at the storms it brews, for many years—I’m wondering at it still, wondering the more—but not at the storms it brews. I thank you for your song, Mademoiselle, I shall not forget it soon.”

CHAPTER X

THE week which followed the coming of Prince Karl to Paris was for all of us, I think, a time of strain, of inactive waiting for we knew not what. There seemed in the very air a sense of impending ill, vague, unformed and gloomy, of catastrophe that waited upon the morrow. Fate played—as von Altdorf would say—but played, as ever, craftily, held her trumps, bided her time, and smiled at us inscrutably across the table.

I say it was a time of inaction, yet we were ever alert in our guard over the person of the Prince. The villains who lurked watchful, somewhere in the throngs that peopled the great city, should lay no hand upon him by fault of ours, should bring no disaster to the crown of Novodnia.

He, poor gentleman, passed the days moodily enough, in all faith, commonly in the apartment of Colonel von Altdorf in the Avenue de l'Observatoire, where admittance was refused every one save those whom von Altdorf himself inspected from the anteroom; sometimes with the others of us in Mallory's studio which had grown to be a meeting-place, a sort of headquarters. Indeed, we must sadly have disturbed poor Denis in his work—for

he still continued his connection with the London paper and wrote his articles and reviews as before. The pittance he received gave him a fair living.

Daily the Prince renewed his siege of MacKenzie for an interview and explanation with the Princess Eleanor, and daily old MacKenzie put him off with a "Not yet, sir! Would you wreck everything? Wait till she's stronger." I knew that Sir Gavin dreaded the inevitable exposure as he had never dreaded anything before. He felt that the responsibility of what we had done rested most heavily upon himself, and he shrank day by day from the storm that must some time break, and day by day put off the Prince upon the old pretext, even after he knew that the pretext was of no weight and that Madame would never be better able to bear the shock.

As for the Prince, he won our respect and sincere pity in these days, if never our love. We grew to see under his Southern impulsiveness, his quick temper and volatile moods, the real man, honourable, true and sincere, a soul too frail for the weight of responsibility and power that hung upon it, a nature too weak for the struggle of duty and love that swayed it. He loved his country—indeed, at the end we had no cause to doubt that—and above all else he loved the woman who had been so strangely torn from him at the very altar steps. But his will lacked the stern strength to make a choice between the two when a choice was de-

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manded. He would neither stay at the post of duty, nor throw up all duties and responsibilities for love. Who among us all shall condemn him? To some the good God gives an iron will, a strength to put aside temptation, but to others a heart whose claims will not be denied.

Be all this as it may, we grew fond of his Highness in those days, and filled with an infinite pity for him that softened our first disgust at his weakness. He was a simple gentleman who should never have been called to a station which he hated and which was far beyond his stature.

As for Denis, he met the Princess Eleanor each afternoon in the garden, save one day when it rained, so that being out of doors was impossible, and the Princess, seized with a perverse whim that they should see each other nowhere but in their walled Paradise, would not meet him at all, but kept to her chamber, and only sent him a letter, very thick in the envelope. Denis spent the day over it, reading it again and again, holding it in his hands when he did not read, and lifting it to his face that he might inhale the faint fragrance of the paper. It was, I think, her first written word to him, and I know that he would have fought for it with his life—such value men will lay upon a scrap of paper scrawled with black!

I was much with him at this time, for that love and admiration for him which, later on, so grew in my heart that I must place him before all the other

men whom I have known, was even then strong in me. I think no one, man or woman, might be with Denis day by day without loving him. He was a great soul.

If the Princess Eleanor, drinking the elixir of love, had flushed all in a moment, as it were, into health and strength and rosy happiness, the change in Denis was equally wonderful. He seemed another man. There were marks of the old life that must be upon him to his grave, but the unhealthy pallor of his face was gone, the restlessness of the eyes, the hollows in the cheeks, the disagreeable lines of cynicism, of dissipation, of recklessness about the mouth. His head was reared high in the air now, his step firmer, his eyes clear and alert and quite free from the nervous twitching that had spoiled them before. Why, even his smile, that no ill living, no debauchery had seemed ever to touch, took on a tenderer semblance, a sweeter charm. Ah, he was a man!

As for the drink, he showed a strength that amazed me. No man who has for years habitually drunk large quantities of any alcoholic liquor can suddenly leave it quite off without becoming a nervous wreck, but I think that Denis, at this time, did as nearly without drink of any sort as a man might do. When we sat at a café he no longer called for absinthe but took brandy or whiskey in water, and very little of it, and at meals he used the wine most sparingly. Sometimes in the studio,

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after a siege of racking nerves that was all too evident, he would take a single glass of absinthe, but quite openly. And I think he never trusted himself to take it when alone. I have seen many a plucky fight against besetting vices but never one so plucky as this.

But it was Colonel von Altdorf whose appearance and conduct were, during these days, most of a mystery to me. He had fallen into a perverse humour that puzzled us all. He had long fits of abstraction from which he would rouse himself to growl an answer to some one's repeated question. He spoke often of having missed much happiness in his way through life, and of how a single man was at best a poor thing and incomplete. Also he took to reading certain volumes of poetry which Denis had about the studio, and I think he memorised some of the verses, for he would read a space, then look up and move his lips as if repeating the lines.

It was all very curious and most unlike von Altdorf. I spoke to Denis of it, but Denis had no eyes for other men's affairs just then, he was busy with his own.

"Let him alone, lad," said Denis. "He's probably in love. They often act that way—when they take it late in life."

"But for the love of Heaven!" I cried, "with whom?"

"The concierge," suggested Denis.

I spoke also of the phenomenon to Miss Jessica

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Mannering upon whom I took frequent occasion to call. Miss Mannering was at first moved to extreme mirth. Then after a little she sighed and smiled and touched the keys of the piano before which she was sitting, in the big, gloomy, stone-arched chamber that MacKenzie had transformed into a sort of drawing room. And she sang under her breath a little snatch of song, "Love in my bosom like a bee ——"

"It would be a great pity," said Miss Mannering, "a great pity if Colonel von Altdorf should fall in love with some one who—who wasn't worthy of him, did n't understand him, would be cruel or cold to him. There are n't many men like Colonel von Altdorf."

"That's true, by Jove," said I warmly. "Von Altdorf's one of the best! But I say, why in the world does he want to fall in love, at his age?"

"His age!" cried Miss Mannering, with more heat than I thought necessary. "You speak as if he were seventy! Men are mere boys till forty," she declared unkindly.

"Oh, are they though?" said I. "I suppose I'm expected to be crushed. Ah, well, I shall be forty some day. And now, perhaps, you will tell me with whom von Altdorf can be in love? I'm quite at a loss—granting that he is in love. Personally I fancy it's indigestion. Denis suggests the concierge."

"You and Mr. Mallory are such wits!" observed

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Miss Mannering scathingly. "Just because a man of forty or forty-one ——"

"Forty-two," said I, brutally.

"Conducts himself," continued Miss Mannering, "in a properly serious manner, you immediately accuse him of being in love. Well, why should n't he be in love? Isn't he a brave and gallant gentleman? Isn't he a faithful friend? Isn't he the sort of man a woman might—might like? Isn't he handsome and ——"

"Handsome?" I interrupted. "Oh, come now, I should n't call von Altdorf handsome. He's not ugly exactly, but ——"

"He is most certainly handsome," said Miss Mannering, with some dignity. "Men never know when other men are attractive. They're always dangling about after some silly girl."

"I'm dangling about after you, at just the present moment," said I, "and I'm not so keen on talking about von Altdorf all the time either. I say won't you sing something to me? They say you've a wonderfully beautiful voice. Sing something soft and pretty—something," said I sentimentally, "about love."

"I don't sing love songs," declared Miss Mannering.

"But," I protested, "you were singing a bit of one just a moment ago, 'Love in my bosom like a bee ——'"

"That—that's different," said she. "I just hap-

pened to think of that. It's a song—I sang once for a—very dear friend—a *very* dear friend. I would n't sing it for any one else."

"Oh, very well then," said I. "I'm going away—I do n't think I like you any more. I shall go back to the studio and watch von Altdorf's evolutions."

But at the door of the room I ran into von Altdorf's arms. Von Altdorf favoured me with a melodramatic scowl.

"What—you here?" said he gruffly.

"And why not?" I demanded, but just then something came to me. I looked from one to the other of them, Miss Jessica Mannering very pink and smiling and radiant. She had n't been radiant while I was there—and von Altdorf with the facial expression of the proverbial small boy caught stealing jam. Then I went out, shaking my head, and made great speed to the studio.

"Denis will laugh till he's weak," said I gleefully. But Denis, when I had told him, said only,

"The lucky devil! Oh, the lucky, lucky devil!" and took his head into his hands muttering still through his fingers, "The lucky, lucky devil!"

Poor old Denis! Some people seemed never to have any luck. I knew of what he was thinking.

CHAPTER XI

ELEANOR of Novodnia came down the gravel path of Paradise and her eyes were the break o' day, lights that did mislead the morn—if only it had n't been golden afternoon.

She sang in a little low voice, as one sings for very happiness. She sang,

“Teach me, only teach, Love!
As I ought
I will speak thy speech, Love,
Think thy thought —

“Meet if thou require it,
Both demands,
Laying flesh and spirit
In thy hands.

“That shall be to-morrow,
Not to-night:
I must bury sorrow
Out of sight!

“—Must a little weep, Love,
(Foolish me!)
And so fall asleep, Love,
Loved by thee.”

Denis, sitting upon the old stone bench by the fountain, stared at the trickling water and would not turn his head. He gave a little gasp though,

and his heart dropped a beat, when she laid her two hands suddenly over his eyes, standing behind him, and demanded whom he thought she possibly might be. They were cool and soft and firm, the hands, but they set his blood to jumping as if they burned him.

"I don't know who you are," he declared untruthfully, "I can't imagine, but I should fancy you are probably an angel—you've an angel's hands—for this is Paradise, this garden, did n't you know? where no one but angels may come—saving one sorry knave who enters by the grace of a certain angel, a sort of archangel, who has pity upon his forlorn state, and is good to him—God bless her!"

The archangel joined the sorry knave upon the old stone bench.

"And he?" she asked softly, "what does he do in return for the certain angel's—pity?"

Denis dropped his face into his hands.

"God help him!" he groaned. "He loves her better than his honour."

"No!" cried the Princess Eleanor sharply. "Ah, no, no! He does not, he must not! Ah, take that back again, Carlo! You love your honour more! Say that you love your honour more! You loved it more when you stayed in Novodnia and would n't come to me. You love it more now—say so, Karl, say so! It would n't be you if you did n't love your honour better than anything else in the

world. Oh, of course, you don't mean what you said, but—don't say it any more, Carlo, it—it hurts me somewhere—inside, you know. It is n't like you."

Denis looked up into her face.

"If ever ——" he began, and moistened his dry lips, "if ever you should find that I'd—if ever I should do a dishonourable thing, Eleanor," said he steadily. "If ever I should take an unfair advantage of some one—of a woman—of—of you, lie to you, deceive you about an important thing that meant much to you—what then, Eleanor? What then?"

The Princess put out a hand and laid it over his lips.

"Don't let's talk about such things, Carlo," said she. "They soil our Paradise. They soil you, even the mention of them. You could n't do such a thing because it simply is n't in you —— If you should do it—if you should—why I think I should —hate you, Karl, yes hate you, for you would have blackened all my world, turned me out of Paradise."

"Yes," said Denis Mallory with a little sigh, "ah, yes, I thought you would say that. I thought so—I—I merely wanted to know, for—curiosity, you see."

"Well you've a most morbid curiosity then," cried the Princess Eleanor, "and you'll be good enough to curb it after this. Curiosity is a vice,

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did n't you know? Oh, dear me, yes! It gets one into shocking trouble. It killed the cat, you know. What cat? Oh, I don't know what cat, just any cat. I suppose it was a lady cat though, to be quite just, and died because it could n't find out what was going on in the next garden. Cats are that way, cats and women—and some men. That's for you, your Serene Highness."

She fell silent for a time, looking down through the garden between the black boled trees.

"Karl," she began after a little, "why do we never talk of what we're going to do, presently, when I'm quite well—— As if I weren't now!—and we—we go away, south to Novodnia and the Palace in Novodni? Ah, there's the sad part, Carlo mio! Realms take their ruler's time and thought and care, do n't they? They never think of the Prince's wife, do they? It never occurs to them that she's sitting alone, very lonely for her Prince who's with his Ministers.—Ah, if you weren't the Prince, Carlo!"

"Yes—yes!" cried Denis Mallory, looking up with a strange, eager light in his eyes. "If I weren't the Prince, Eleanor?"

"If you were n't the Prince, Carlo, if you had no realm to govern, no enemies to fight, no duties to worry over!—What would you do, Carlo, if you were n't the Prince nor I the Princess?"

Mallory threw out his arms half fiercely, gripping his hands. His face was flushed and his eyes shone.

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“If I weren’t the Prince nor you the Princess, Eleanor!” said he, “if I’d nothing to hold me from it, nothing to stand in the way? If I were only a man and you a woman?—why I’d come to you, here in our Paradise, one day, like this. I’d whisper in your ear ‘Dearest of everything, what are we waiting for, you and I? Listen! To-night when all’s dark, when you’ve gone to your room and they think you’ve gone to your bed, when the lights are out and the servants asleep, come away, very softly, to make no noise, oh, very softly! Come out into the garden under the chestnut-trees. I’ll be waiting for you by the fountain, and we’ll go, hand in hand down under the trees, down to the little low door in the wall that gives upon the Boulevard. We’ll unlock the door and let ourselves out. Then we’ll close it again very carefully. There will be a carriage waiting at the curb—and the broad world waiting beyond, the broad world to pick and choose from, Eleanor. Oh, and a man to care for you, shelter you, guard you from ill, who loves you so that he can’t speak of it without a sort of dizziness, who trembles at your fingertips!—what are we waiting for, you and I?’”

“What are we waiting for, you and I?” said the Princess Eleanor in a half whisper. “Ah, if you weren’t the Prince nor I the Princess! What would you say to—the woman who came down through the garden and out the little low door in the wall, with you? How would you love her?”

"How should I love her?" cried Denis Mallory in a shaking voice. "How should I love her, Eleanor? How shall I say? Are there words for such things? How should I love her? Oh, words beggar love, my sweet! They must be the same old words that a thousand other men with paltry souls have breathed to a thousand other women whose cheap vanity must be fed. Should I drag her to their low level with set phrases, canting words? Tell her that her eyes are stars, and her mouth is a red flower afire, and her cheeks white roses flushed with love? How should I love her, Eleanor? Madly as a martyr loves the cause he dies for, tenderly as the sunshine loves the garden that it wakes to life, as constantly as the tide loves the moon that it follows about the earth! How should I love her? Why, so that all lowness, all meanness, all deceit, all old sorrows and old sins must be laid away, left utterly behind, so that my heart were a rose garden for her to walk in, my soul a shrine with her image over the altar! Ah, I should be a *man* with her beside me, Eleanor!"

"If you were not the Prince nor I the Princess," said she in a low hushed voice that trembled when she spoke, "why then, you would be the King and I the Queen, King and Queen of all the great, bright, beautiful world! Free to wander hand in hand from one end of our realm to the other—and the world would be a rose garden then, Carlo, for all my world would be your heart, my King. Ah, I

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should be the humblest queen that ever lived, for I'd ask no more of privilege than to look in your eyes and see the love there, watch your smile and see how bright the sun shone. The winged angels in Heaven must go envying you and me—if you were not the Prince nor I the Princess!”

A sparrow swooped to the fountain's curb before their feet and gathered a wisp of straw, a loop of cord. His mate twittered from the branches above while he rose with his burden.

“Yonder goes a king!” cried the Princess Eleanor softly. “And his queen waits and watches for his home-coming. They're building a palace.”

She laid her head against the man's shoulder and tears glittered over her cheeks.

“See, there he goes again, his Majesty! His queen is with him this time. She would n't bear him out of her sight—how she loves him! How she plumes her poor little grey feathers to look well in his eyes! His heart is all her world.”

“If I were not the Prince nor you the Princess!” said Denis Mallory.

“The night will come,” she whispered, “and I shall go to my room. After a time the servants will be in their beds and the lights out. The fountain will be waiting here and the little closed door in the wall. The carriage will be waiting outside, a whole rank of carriages, and all the wide world beyond.”

She raised her head from his shoulder and turned,

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sitting, so that she leaned against him and her hands lay folded upon her breast. Her breath was warm on his lips and she looked into his eyes.

Mallory's heart gave a great leap and stood quite still. The blood went from his face.

"You—you'd—go?" he faltered. "You'd—go?"

"What are we waiting for, you and I?" whispered the Princess Eleanor. "Shall we never see our kingdom? Life o' my soul your heart jumps under mine! Shall we trade Paradise for a crown?" She dropped her face upon his breast and a coil of her hair lay fragrant against his lips.

"Aye," said he in a queer hoarse whisper, and his eyes stared over her head down among the trees of the garden. "Aye we could go, and no one stop us, no one find us and bring us back. We could go very far away where they'd never think to look for us, very far away to the other side of the world—— That's better than—than Novodnia! Would you dare it, Eleanor? Would you come with me?"

"Yes, yes!" said the voice muffled upon his breast.

Mallory gave a little exultant cry, a little nervous exclamation of triumph.

"Shall we trade Paradise for a scruple?" he cried. "Is n't a heaven like that worth more than a point of—a point of—honour? Ah!"

The Princess raised her head quickly from his breast. His arm about her had slackened a bit.

"A point of—honour?" said the Princess slowly. "Why, it is a point of honour—is n't it, Carlo? Why I've been a bit mad—I think."

She passed a hand across her eyes and gave her head a little shake as if she would rid herself of a dream, a vision.

"A point of honour! Of course it's honour! Carlo, Carlo, I thought for the time of nothing but what might be before us out—out yonder in the world. I never thought what going away meant—— Oh, I was mad, Carlo mio, drunk with love. I was dreaming!"

"And why not?" cried Mallory frowning out over her fiercely as if some one stood there accusing him. "God in Heaven, why not? Why sha' n't we take what we may when it's put before us? God in Heaven, why not? Have I been so happy, so lapped in content, that I should throw away my only chance for happiness? Think of the life I've led! Ah-h-h, think of it! Shall I throw heaven away for what the world calls honour? Come with me, Eleanor! Ah, come with me! We'll live such a life, such a life!"

But the girl only clung to him, looking up into his face anxiously, questioningly.

"I know what the life would be, Karl," she said softly. "Oh, I know! I dare n't let myself think of it, long. Don't I know what it would be? But wouldn't we be sorry—after a time? Would n't we regret breaking with our honour——"

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It's almost all we have, *ici bas*, isn't it, dear? Honour! How would a whole lifetime founded upon dishonour seem, I wonder? Would n't we be sorry? I don't know, as I live, I don't know, Karl. You must decide for us both. If you want me to go, I'll go, for I'm very weak. I'm drunk with love still, I'm full of what that careless, free life might be, our Paradise. You must decide, dear. Whatever you say, I'll do. I'll be the wife of a common gentleman, or I'll be the wife of a busy Prince. Choose for me, Karl."

Mallory put her from him, gently, and rose to his feet and went over to the little fountain, and stood there with his back to the Princess, fighting his fight.

I think he knew what the end must be. I think he had known from the first moment when he had put the thing sanely to his judgment, but the great passion of love that he bore the Princess fought bitterly for mastery of him, painted in cruelly glowing tints the life that lay open to his choice, the possession that must otherwise be lost to him utterly—all for what the world calls honour.

He turned back toward the Princess Eleanor with a hopeless little gesture, and his head drooped.

"If there's any honour left to such a man as I, Eleanor," said he wearily, "it is n't of much consequence, and I suppose I should not hesitate to chuck it over if the price were high enough, but you've laid your honour in my hands, dear, and I

may n't soil it. Some day—later on, you'll know what I'm giving up."

But the Princess came to him, swiftly, and put out her arms over his shoulders so that her hands held the back of his head, and kissed him, and laid her head once more upon his breast.

"I knew what you'd choose, dear heart," she cried very low. "Ah, I knew! Honour binds us both, Carlo, does n't it? And we must stay. You could not love me dear so much, loved you not honour more. It's the busy Prince, then, is n't it, dear? Still, I shall be your wife. It is n't as if we were to part, so do n't let's be so solemn over it. I'm still your wife, Karl."

"Ah, yes, yes," said Denis looking away. "Yes you'll still be my—wife. It is n't as if we were to part. Come, Eleanor, you must go in. The sun is low and it's growing cool. Come, or MacKenzie will say that I'm not taking proper care of you."

Under the kind shelter of the old refectory porch she raised her face to him and he kissed her lips.

"You must remember—later on, Eleanor," said he—his voice still sounded weary and overwrought—"remember that I gave up what—what you offered me—that I was n't quite so despicable as I might have been. Ah, you loveliest thing in all God's great world, how I love you! Heart's soul, how I love you!" And he turned and left her and went down through the long garden with his head hanging low.

CHAPTER XII

DENIS and I were sitting in the studio industriously occupied in blowing smoke rings—at which art I am believed to be an adept. And indeed it is a harmless pastime, I protest.

It was near noon and Denis had been hard at work all the morning with his weekly article for the London paper. A quite imposing pile of written sheets lay before him on the table.

Then von Altdorf stamped into the room scowling most portentously.

“The Prince not here?” he snapped as if he suspected us of having stuffed away his Highness of Novodnia under the divan or in a closet.

“No, he hasn’t been in to-day,” said Denis between rings.

“Well then,” cried von Altdorf angrily, “I’d like to know where the devil he is! and why the devil he leaves his rooms without my knowledge and without any word as to where he’s going! It’s enough to exasperate a saint!”

“Tut, tut, man, man!” said Denis, with an amused laugh. “Sit down, and calm yourself. I’m not sure but your language is *lèse majesté*. I shall speak to the Prince about it. My word! one

might think the Prince a naughty child or an erring servant. Do you feed him and tuck him into his bed o' nights, von Altdorf?"

But von Altdorf was in no mood for jest.

"You wouldn't think it so dashed funny if he were to fall into the hands of those devils who tracked him here, would you?" he growled. "Well, that's just what he'll do if he persists in going about alone and unprotected. Do n't you believe for a moment that because we haven't seen them in a long while they're not dogging every move he makes. That we haven't seen them only proves them the cleverer."

Denis blew a big ring and drove a little one through it. He smiled delightedly upon his work.

"They won't touch the Prince," said he carelessly.

"Won't — Oh, don't be an ass!" cried the disgusted diplomat.

Denis shood his head.

"No, they won't touch the Prince," he repeated. "I do n't believe they're even keeping more than a casual eye upon him. How much do you suppose their cause would be worth in Novodnia if it were known that they'd kidnapped or killed the Prince? Man, the populace would rise up and chase every Pavelovitch follower into the Danube! No, no, they're no such fools as that. They want to keep Karl out of the country, all right enough, but they want to keep him out seemingly at his own volition.

If you'll think it over a bit you'd see that they'd only ruin their cause by harming or killing him."

"You've missed your vocation, lad," said Colonel von Altdorf with a half sneer. "You belong to the diplomatic service—or the secret police. You've a keen mind." But I could see that he was thinking for all that, and half convinced.

"And whom then," he persisted, "whom then should you think they're after, my acute young friend, if not the Prince?"

Denis dropped his eyes and a sudden shade passed over his face.

"If they're after any one at all," said he, "it's some one whose abduction would keep the Prince, of his own will, away from Novodnia in search for them till he should run them down. But this person, I may add, is being uncommonly well guarded."

Von Altdorf gasped.

"You mean ——?" he cried. "You mean the ——"

"I mean whomever you like," said Mallory, "but your friends Steinbrücke and company may as well go back to Novodnia. They won't get what they're after."

There were hurried steps without the door and MacKenzie burst into the room panting and dishevelled. His big, square face was mottled red and white. His eyes showed an excitement that I had never yet seen in them, and he stood before us

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staring and breathing hard. His mouth worked as if he would speak but could not.

Colonel von Altdorf was up in an instant, his face full of a nameless fear. He was thinking, I knew, of the absent Prince. He put out a shaking hand upon MacKenzie's arm.

"What is it, man?" he cried sharply. "What is it? What's wrong? For God's sake, can't you speak? What's the matter?"

MacKenzie let himself down into a chair, and his chin sank upon his breast.

"He's told her!" said he. "The Prince has told her!"

There was a swift, hoarse cry from Denis Malory, a cry that brought us all to our feet. He was standing by the table with the chair in which he had sat gripped in one hand, lifted far from the floor. His face was quite white, jaw set, lips a straight, thin line, and his eyes burned under lowered brows. He stood so, leaning forward a bit, staring at MacKenzie's bowed head for several seconds, I should think. Then all at once he fell back into his seat, seemed to collapse, crumple together, and laid his arms upon the table, and dropped his head upon them. His shoulders twisted and heaved.

I think that for the time the minds of all of us were wholly with him and that we gave little or no thought to the stricken Princess.

I caught von Altdorf's eyes and, as I live, they

were filled with tears, and his brows were twisted and drawn in grief. Perhaps my own were like them. I take no shame for it. He went across to the table and bent over the man who lay there. He slipped an arm about the bowed shoulders.

"Denis, old lad!" said he. Could that be von Altdorf's voice? It was gentle as a woman's! "Why, dear old lad, it had to come. You knew it had to come. Don't let it knock you under. God knows, lad, we're all sorry enough for the whole wretched business; and God knows we all wish it could end otherwise—but it can't. There never was a chance that it could, not an honourable chance. Come, lad, you've played a man's part, play the man now! You're losing what's all the world to you. Aye, I know, I know, but you've made a trio of friends here that'll stand by you to the last ditch.—Their hearts are sore for you, lad.—Come, buck up! There's much to do yet. The game's not over by a long time."

Denis raised his head from his arms. His face was quite white and very haggard, but there was no trace of feeling upon it. Then he drew a long breath, stretching his arms outward, and was his old self again, save that there was no smile upon his lips nor light in his eyes, but only an utter calm.

He went over to MacKenzie, who had left his seat and was moving restlessly about the room. He took him by the shoulders and looked into his face.

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"How does—how does she take it?" he asked.
"Was she—badly—shocked? Too badly?"

Old MacKenzie looked away.

"She's—much—incensed against ye, lad," said he gently. "She's a bit unreasonable—just now.—She won't see that the thing had to be done——Ye—would n't best try to see her—now."

"Yes, yes!" said Denis, impatiently. "Yes, yes, I know all that—of course she thinks me a blackguard—I know all that—— Why, in God's name, should n't she?—But how has she taken the shock? Will it do her great ill? Will she bear it safely? Tell me if you think she'll get over it."

His only thought seemed to be for her safety and welfare—to make sure that she would bear the strain.

"Why, as for that," said MacKenzie, "yes, lad, I think she'll weather it. She's strong and well. She's able to meet a great shock. 'Tis her—her resentment an' sense o' wrong that's keeping her up now in the worst of it. She's very angry an' her hurt pride is all in her thoughts. What it will be when the full realisation comes to her later, only God knows, but I think she'll weather it. She has great reserve strength, an' as I've said she's very angry. Anger is a buffer to grief, of which no one but a medical man appreciates the value."

Denis went back to his table and rested his head upon his hands.

"That's all that matters," said he wearily, "just

that she comes through it safely, that she takes no lasting harm. The rest is—why the rest is—nothing.”

Then there was a knock at the door and the Prince Karl of Novodnia entered. He came into the room with a certain lingering hesitation, and glanced up at our faces one by one, furtively under his brows, as if he feared what his reception might be.

Indeed he met no friendly glance nor welcoming eye. Colonel von Altdorf's face was set and hard, MacKenzie lowered upon him gloomily, and I looked away. Only Denis rose at once and spoke with his ordinary courtesy as if nothing had happened.

“Pray sit down, sir,” said he. “Sir Gavin has just been telling us that you have had an interview with the Princess Eleanor. Our task then, I take it, is nearly at an end.”

The Prince dropped into a chair and his eyes wandered dully about the room, avoiding our faces. He seemed, in truth, little like a man who has just claimed his wife after months of separation. Indeed he appeared in the very depths of depression. He sat for a time in gloomy silence, that no one of us offered to break, but at last the hostility about him seemed to reach his nerves, rouse him to a sullen defiance. He looked up at MacKenzie and his face flushed.

“You show small approval of what I've done, sir,” said he.

The Scotsman turned upon him like an angry lion.

"Approval?" he cried, towering above the sulky figure in the chair, "approval, say you? By the livin' God, sir, 'tis no thanks to you that the Princess Eleanor is alive to-day! You've done all ye could to make my treatment an' the efforts of all these gentlemen here, of no avail. First ye come here with no manner o' warnin' an' though 'tis explained to ye wi' care what we're tryin' to do in the matter o' saving yer wife's reason, ye try to break in upon her the first instant—through a silly jealousy worthy o' a child. Ye try, furthermore, to kill a gallant gentleman who's givin' his time to your service an' hers, an' who spares your life, as by heaven I'd never ha' done. Then lastly, full o' the same silly jealousy, no doubt, ye make yer way into my house an' blurt out the whole truth like an eediot, careless o' whether yer wife can bear the shock or no. Before God, sir, 'tis all I can do not to lay hands upon ye!"

The Prince's face blazed crimson.

"Colonel von Altdorf," said he, "will you remind this—gentleman, to whom he is speaking?"

Von Altdorf rose at once to his feet and saluted.

"Sir Gavin," he said coldly, "my duty to my master compels me to warn you that your language is lacking in proper respect."

His tone and his manner shifted the rebuke from MacKenzie and laid it upon the Prince. It was

quite plain where his sympathy lay, and the Prince dropped his eyes to the floor.

"Ye cannot frighten me, sir," said the big Scotsman sternly, "ye may as well save your breath. I'm a British subject an' as such owe ye no allegiance. 'Tis man to man, Karl o' Novodnia, an' I tell ye again ye have done all in your power to undo what we gentlemen have been tryin' to accomplish, in your service. I tell ye ye've no right to go to my house in my absence an' trouble a patient o' mine, wife or no wife. She's my patient while she's under my charge an' I'm no in the habit o' havin' my methods interfered with. In the proper time the truth ye blurted out to-day would ha' been broken to her gently, gradually, by the proper people an' all o' the shock possible, spared her. Ye have spared her nothing, by heaven! An' I'll not answer for the consequences. I wash my hands o' the matter here an' now. Ye ha' brought my skill an' plans and care all to naught. I wonder are ye proud o' your work!"

The Prince of Novodnia raised his bent head and tried to square his huddled shoulders.

"That will do, sir," said he, with a sort of pathetic dignity, a sort of lonely, friendless sadness that touched my sympathy.

"That will do, sir. You make yourself quite clear, and it is quite clear also that these gentlemen feel as you do. I dare say you are right but I—I cannot bear any more just now." He looked from

one face to another with a pitiful half eagerness, as though he searched for a ray of feeling, of encouragement.

"I give you my word," said he, "that when I left the Avenue de l'Observatoire this morning I had no thought of attempting to see the Princess, no thought save of coming here in the ordinary fashion. It—it was a sudden impulse, an overwhelming impulse that could not be denied. I tell you I have waited till endurance cracked. I have been put off day by day with promises of the near future. I've seen myself no nearer the goal than when I came to Paris, another man taking my place, winning my wife's—my wife's—care—nay sir, I impute to you no blame! I do not question your honour or your good faith—do not misunderstand me! I could bear it no longer! Rash I may be, gentlemen, headstrong and careless, too little thoughtful of the harm I may do, but—I love my wife and my love has wrecked my judgment. If I have brought grief to her, I must be an equal sufferer, for as I live, I think I shall never win my wife's love. Gentlemen, gentlemen, have you nothing but condemnation for me?"

"Aye, sir, pity, pity!" cried Denis, springing up and going over to him, while the others of us sat in sullen silence. "Pity—and understanding, sir! There is no one of us who can swear that he would have done otherwise in your place. Sir Gavin is angry that his care has come to nothing, and we

others—why, a little aghast that our plans have been so suddenly overturned, but—shall a man mad with love be reasonable or think of consequences? Indeed I feel for you, sir, if none of these gentlemen do the same. Our trick could have endured but little longer at the best. Come, sir, courage, courage! If the Princess seems unready, at the moment, to yield you her—her love, why time will do everything. She'll—she'll love you yet. I—I feel ——” But his voice was slipping from his control, shaking dangerously, and he turned about quickly and went over to the window that gave upon the garden, and stood there with his face against the glass. I slipped an arm over his shoulders and stood with him.

“By my faith in God, Denis,” said I, and my voice was no steadier than his, “you’re the bravest man and the truest gentleman in the world. You shame us all!” I saw his face and turned my eyes away.

“She’ll never love the Prince, Denis,” said I after a pause. I thought it might be a ray of comfort to him in his darkness.

“She must!” he cried. “God help us both! She must! It’s her only hope of happiness. She’ll turn to him in her utter disgust of me, turn to him for shelter —— What do I matter if only she’s happy, Ted? That’s all that counts, just that she may be happy! Ah, yes, she’ll come to love the Prince—in time.”

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But I shook my head.

"She'll love you while she lives, Denis," I said, "as you'll love her—and that's something."

"As I'll love her," said he very low, and staring out into the garden that was Paradise no longer.

"Why, yes, Teddy, that's something—— Ah, no, no, it mustn't be true—it won't be true! Don't try to comfort a chap, Teddy. I shall get on—somehow."

And behind us, in the room, I heard the three others talking, old MacKenzie in a moderated voice, the Prince very wearily as if he saw his dream shattered forever, von Altdorf anxiously, and urging his master to return to Novodnia where the need for him was so desperate.

Fate had played one of her trumps—but only one.

CHAPTER XIII

AND this is how the thing that had set all our plans at naught came about. Miss Jessica Mannering was in the great, gloomy, stone-arched chamber which had been made into a reception and music room. She had been arranging some jonquils, a great yellow cluster of them, in a bronze jar upon the piano, and was sitting before that instrument idly touching the keys. Her fingers strayed unwittingly into a certain quaint old song, a madrigal of Lodge's, "Love in my bosom like a bee——" which seemed to rouse in her pleasant reflections, for she smiled softly, as she played, and a little flush rose to her cheeks.

Then the maid, Fifine, appeared, saying that a gentleman wished to see Mademoiselle. The little flush deepened a bit. She knew who the "gentleman" was.

"Colonel von Altdorf is always to come in at once, Fifine!" said she. "You need never ask."

But the man who entered the room immediately bore no likeness to Colonel von Altdorf. She had known this man many months before in New York and in Newport.

"Prince Karl!" gasped Miss Mannering. "Prince—Karl?—Oh, sir, sir, you ought not to come here!

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Does Colonel von Altdorf know? Oh, you must n't stay! What if Eleanor should see you?" She had fallen back against the piano in her amazement, and she clasped her hands excitedly before her as if she would pray him to be gone.

"You must not be seen here, Prince," she repeated. "Ah, you should not have come!"

"I have come, Mademoiselle," cried the Prince, "to see my wife! God in Heaven, am I to be put off forever?—Von Altdorf! Enough of von Altdorf! Is he my governor, my keeper? I tell you, Mademoiselle, I can bear it no longer. Has a husband no rights? Am I to stand by idle while another man plays my part, wins my wife from me forever?—Let me see her! Mademoiselle, you are a woman, you are not as those men, MacKenzie, von Altdorf, Creighton, cold, careful, without heart! Let me see her. By heaven I demand it! Who, I ask you, is Prince of Novodnia and husband of the Princess Eleanor? Is it that gentleman whom she meets in the garden daily, or is it I?"

"Oh, Prince, Prince!" begged Miss Mannering. "Pray be calm! Heaven knows how we all regret the deception we have had to practice. It has been through no desire of ours that you were kept away from Eleanor—will you not be wise and go quickly before she may happen in here? She is not yet fit to see you. It must be broken to her gently."

"Mademoiselle!" he cried, "I will be put off no longer. I cannot allow this deception to go on. I

demand an interview with my wife the Princess. No man with—— Great God Almighty! Eleanor! Eleanor!”

Miss Mannering saw his face go suddenly white and his jaw drop as his voice left him in a choking gasp, and she turned about with a little shriek.

The Princess Eleanor came forward slowly from the doorway where she had been standing. She looked from her cousin to the man who stood near, and back again to Miss Mannering, with a puzzled, questioning expression. She was frowning slightly and her eyes were clouded.

“What—what do you mean by a—deception going on—*your* wife the Princess Eleanor—meeting another man daily in the garden?” she said in a slow, wondering tone. “What is all this about?—Jessica, who is this——? Ah!” She caught herself up sharply as she saw the Prince’s face full in the light, and moved a little away from him, putting out her hand to Miss Mannering.

“Why this is—the man who—who frightened me the other day in the garden,” she said, still in her low, puzzled tone. “What does he—want, Jess? Does he want to see the Prince? Oh, Jessica, Jessica, what is it all about? What is this dreadful mystery? Why, Jess, you’re trembling! I’ve heard all you’ve said to each other, what does he mean by saying that he’s the Prince? Why, he’s not the Prince at all! Why did you call him

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Prince, Jess? Why did n't you want me to see him? I—oh tell me what it's all about!"

Miss Jessica Mannering flashed a desperate warning to the Prince and took her cousin by the shoulders. "It's nothing, nothing, dear!" she cried. "Come away! You must n't be excited over trifles. This is another Prince from—somewhere near Novodnia. He wants to see Prince Karl upon—business of state. Come away, Eleanor, come!"

But the Princess Eleanor would not be moved. She freed herself from the arm that Miss Mannering had thrown around her, and shook her head decidedly. Her eyes did not leave the man's face.

"Don't try to hoodwink me, Jess," said she. "There's some mystery here, and I must know of it—— Where have I seen this gentleman before? His face—why his face is oddly familiar!" She pressed a hand over her eyes a moment as if she would clear away the mist from her mind.

"Who are you, sir?" she asked. "I seem to know you, but—I—my memory plays me false."

The Prince looked at Miss Jessica Mannering and made a little gesture of desperation.

"Madame!" said he, "I am Carol Ferdinand, Prince of Novodnia. Ah, Eleanor, Eleanor! do n't you know me?"

The Princess Eleanor caught her hand swiftly to her breast and stared into the man's face. Her eyes were dilated, very wide and dark, and her lips parted. She seemed not to breathe at all. After

some little time she turned her head, not moving her body, and her wide eyes burned into those of her cousin. Miss Mannering dropped her face into her hands and fell to sobbing, and the Princess looked again toward the man.

"You?" she said in a slow half whisper. "*You*, Prince of Novodnia and my husband? Why—why I must have misunderstood—I must be—dream—— Ah, if this is a jest, sir, I tell you it is a poor one! I do n't follow your humour. Yet your—your face? Oh, in Heaven's name, can't you explain? Jess, Jess, tell me! What does it all mean?" Her voice had risen to a cry. "This man Prince of Novodnia? Why then, what is *my* Prince? This man my hus—— Why Jessica, I've been with my husband for a fortnight, every day! Am I mad or are you? Jess, what does it all mean?"

Miss Mannering drew her cousin into her arms and bent the dazed, trembling head till it lay upon her shoulder.

"Listen, dearest!" said she. "I must tell you the truth now, the whole truth, at any cost, though we had meant to break it to you gently. This gentleman *is* Prince Karl of Novodnia—— No, no! Wait, Eleanor! He was detained in Novodnia by the troubles there, and could not by any chance get away to come to you here in Paris. But you were on the edge of—of nervous prostration, dear—or worse. You imagined that we were trying to keep your husband from you—— Ah,

you imagined all sorts of things, till we were quite desperate, Sir Gavin and the rest of us. So, some one suggested that—that another gentleman take the Prince's place—since the Prince might not come—and a Mr. Mallory, Denis Mallory——Wait, wait, Eleanor!—pretended to be the Prince your husband, to save your reason and perhaps your life. Oh, it is he, Eleanor, whom you have been seeing every day! The real Prince came unexpectedly that day when you first saw him, when he frightened you in the garden."

The Princess Eleanor moved slowly away from her cousin and stood looking at her with sombre eyes.

"It—is n't—true," she said very low, and as if to herself, but there was no conviction in the tone. "It—is n't true! Why, of course, it can't be true. *My* Karl not the Prince, not my husband? My Karl? Jess, dear, please tell me that you're joking or I dreaming or that I'm quite, quite mad! Carlo's not Carlo at all, but a Mr. Mallory? This—this gentleman is Carlo, my husband? Oh, Jessica, do n't let me believe you! Take hold of me a—moment, dear, things are—going round—just a bit."

"Eleanor!" said the Prince. "Ah, Eleanor, Eleanor!"

She covered her face with shaking hands and swayed in Miss Mannering's arms.

"I tell you I *won't* believe it!" she cried fiercely. Her voice had gone quite beyond control and was

hoarse and unnatural. "I won't, I won't! *My* Karl play a trick like that? Why, it is n't in him! He couldn't do it! He is the very soul of all honour! Do you want me to believe him a black-guard? *him*? Why, Jess, Jess, there's some dreadful mistake somewhere, I know there is—I'd trust him against all the world—sooner than my own self, I tell you. No, oh no, he'd never lie to me."

"Dearest!" cried Jessica Mannering, "don't you understand that it was to save you? We feared for your very reason, Eleanor, for your life! It was only something desperate that would save you. Ah, dear, dear, do you think I'd be telling you this, making you suffer so if it weren't true? Can't you see that we had to lie to you for your own sake?"

The Princess moved away from her again, and leaned against the wall near by, laying her head upon the rough hangings. She shivered as if she were cold, and pulled the collar of her waist closer about her throat.

"Lie to me?" she said. "Oh yes, yes, it might be necessary to lie to me, sometimes, for my own good — Oh yes, I can see that, but give me a man that you call my husband, let me see him every day, grow to know him, care for him, love him as no human being ever was loved before? Centre my whole life, my world, my heaven to come in the depths of his eyes, in the smile of his

lips? Oh, it's infamous! It's unbelievable! Is a woman's sanity, nay, her life itself, more than her soul? I tell you that man, whom you say is not my husband, has the very soul of me between his hands! I've grown to love him till I'm part of him, and he of me, my soul can never be my own again any more than my heart can. It's infamous, I say! That's what you've done for me, all of you! That's what you've robbed me of, my immortal soul! And for my health's sake! Oh-h!—And—and now you bring this man here and say that he's my husband! You expect me to say to him 'Oh yes, yes it's been nice with your substitute but now that you've come I'll go away with you when you will.' 'I'? There is n't any I! I'm part of that man whom I've grown to love! And now you ask me to believe him a blackguard!" She turned her face against the wall and hid it with her hands. "A blackguard!" she moaned. "My King a blackguard! 'I could not love thee dear so much, loved I not honour more'—'loved I not honour more!' Carlo, Carlo!"

She stood so, face to the wall, for a long time, silent, and save for an occasional fit of trembling, motionless, while the other two looked into each other's eyes with a dumb despair.

When at last she turned to them again she was quite calm, though, now and then, as she spoke, her lips quivered, and she was forced to pause a instant to steady her voice,

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"It would seem, sir," said she, not lifting her eyes to his face, "that you are my husband—if indeed we have come at last to the truth in this tragedy of errors. Had I heart or brain left with feeling I think I should be sorry for you, for it appears that I have never brought you anything but grief and anxiety. I—I cannot speak now of our relations. You—must give me time to think. My world, sir, has been cut from under my feet. The one I loved and trusted and—worshipped most of all living beings has proved a blackguard and it is not strange that I am left without bearings or standards. I have no love left to give you, Prince. I have no love left in me, nor trust nor faith. I care not at all what becomes of me, for all that made my life is wrecked and dead utterly. May I beg you to leave me for to-day? I will see you, if you wish, later, to—to speak of the—future. Oh, leave us quickly, sir, I can't bear—I——" Her voice broke into great shaking sobs and she sank down into one of the big chairs that stood near, and hid her face again.

The Prince of Novodnia glanced at Miss Jessica Mannering, and taking up his hat tiptoed softly out of the room.

Miss Mannering dropped upon her knees beside the chair and threw her two arms about the huddled figure, laying her face against the bronzed head and sobbing, but the Princess Eleanor put her away and rose to her feet, choking down

the great sobs that shook her, with a fierce effort.

"Do n't touch me, please," she said in a half whisper. "I—I do n't seem to want any one to—to touch me or be near me. I want to be alone—quite alone. You've quite wrecked my life—among you, and I presume I shall never—forgive you for it. No, I do n't think I hate you, quite. But I do n't love you any more." She moved uncertainly toward the door that led to the great staircase. In the doorway she paused an instant, and looked back.

"Please never mention that—that impostor to me—again," said the Princess Eleanor, and went slowly up the stairs to her chamber.

Miss Jessica Mannering on her knees by the big chair dropped her face upon her arms and wept till the tears would no longer flow.

CHAPTER XIV

“EH?” said Denis wearily, “what’s ahead? God knows, not I. Von Altdorf has been laying siege to the Prince again——Gad, if I were the Prince, I’d kill von Altdorf—and he has promised to go back to Novodnia as soon as he has had another talk with—with Her, so that he’ll know where he stands and what the outcome is to be.”

We were sitting together in the studio—it was two days after the Princess had been told the truth—Denis at the table with his elbows upon it and his head in his hands; and I in the long steamer chair, smoking a pipe, and trying to beguile Denis with wonder inspiring rings of smoke.

“But what’s the outcome to be?” I demanded. Denis shook his head.

“Again, God knows,” said he, “and He won’t tell, but I think she will in time go to the Prince—indeed I’m certain of it. He’s her husband and she has—an exalted sense of—of honour and duty. Ah, yes, she’ll go to him—if not for love, still for duty. They’ll find some way to make her elevation possible, to make it popular among the people, and she’ll fill her high position as a princess should. Aye, a throne will become her. She was born for

state. Have you—happened to hear anything about her since day before yesterday, Ted? Have you been at the house?"

"Why, no," said I, "I meant to have gone there yesterday, but something else came up—I'll run over now. Miss Mannering will be there of course. Will you come?"

He looked up eagerly for an instant. I knew how he was longing to go, to see Miss Mannering himself, ask her all the things that he might not ask of any one else, hear the littlest details of that lamentable scene with the Prince. But he shook his head.

"No, Ted, no," said he, "I mustn't go. It wouldn't do at all. She might see me there, happen into the room while we were calling. Ah, no, you must go alone, lad. But—ask a great deal about her, Teddy! Find out just how she is, if it has weakened her at all, if she's ill, how she seems and looks. Ah, remember, Ted, that I want to know everything! Nothing's too little or too trivial. Bah! I'm growing womanish! Don't mind me, lad, just make your call and—and ask all the questions you can. I shall be waiting here for you."

"I'll do my best, old chap," said I. "Miss Mannering sha'n't get off easily, I promise you. Yes, wait here, I shall not be long."

I found Miss Jessica Mannering in the music-room. She was sitting in one of the big stuffed

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chairs near a window, with a book, and looked up with a trace of eagerness as I came in. I was n't at all cut up when the trace of eagerness died away at sight of me, for I'd no hopes of rivaling von Altdorf.

"I've come to enquire about the Princess," said I. "Den—we're all tremendously worried, of course, and, if you don't mind my saying it, you look worried, too."

Indeed, I had never seen Miss Mannering in quite this guise. Her eyes were indisputably red from weeping. She was very pale and drawn and seemed on the verge of illness.

She laid her head back restlessly upon the cushions of the big chair, and sighed.

"Worried?" said she, "worried? I'm half mad, and quite ill from anxiety and lack of sleep. Eleanor will hardly speak to me or to Sir Gavin, or to Colonel von Altdorf who was here yesterday. I don't know what to do or say, Mr. Creighton—if only she'd a mother! You see I am the only one of the family here in Paris, for my uncle, Eleanor's father, was called back to America, long ago. I'm quite at my wits' end."

"She's not ill again?" I asked, "er—mentally or otherwise? It has n't forced her into a relapse?"

"Oh, no, I think not," said the girl. "she seems strong enough. Sir Gavin says that it's her anger and resentment that are keeping her up, for she's terribly angry in her proud, cold way. Indeed, one

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can't blame her for it, nor for turning against us all as she has done. She feels that an almost unspeakable humiliation has been put upon her, in presenting Mr. Mallory as her husband, and allowing her to fall so madly in love with him. Ah, she did love him, Mr. Creighton! I suppose none of us will ever know how she loved him. Now, she won't allow his name to be mentioned before her—as if we'd any chance! We seldom see her. She keeps to her own rooms, has her meals sent there, indeed, save that yesterday she came down for dinner. Poor Eleanor! She's had so much more than her share of suffering, has n't she? It seems as if Fate—as Colonel von Altdorf would say—had chosen her for misfortune. I suppose there is no more terrible thing than to have the one person whom, out of all the world, you love most, proved all at once an impostor, and, as it must seem to you, a villain. She says that her world is cut from under her feet, that there's no love nor trust nor faith left in her. She says she will never forgive us all, and I dare say it is true. Her whole mind has been turned into the bitterest resentment."

"Alas!" said I, "von Altdorf's right. Fate plays—and makes sorry figures of us all. What's to be done but wait?"

And Miss Mannering dropped her hands listlessly into her lap and answered as Denis had answered half an hour before.

"God knows!"

There was a stir of draperies upon the stairs and outside the door that led into the long hall, and the Princess Eleanor of Novodnia entered.

"I am looking for my Browning," she said from the doorway. "Have you it, Jessi——" She saw me and paused a moment.

"Ah, Mr.—Creighton!" said she, "I—I did not know you were here."

"I trust I do n't intrude, madame," said I, bowing.

"Why, not at all," said the Princess. "Miss Mannering will tell you that you are always welcome, sir."

She took up her book from the table, and left the room with a little inclination of her head.

I find, now that I come to write it, that I can give no adequate description of the strange alteration which had taken place in her, of the cold, proud aloofness, the regal majesty that seemed to hold her at some great inexplicable distance. She seemed to have gained in stature, to tower above us, lofty and alien in her bitterness and proud grief. As Miss Mannering had said, she had suffered little physical ill. She appeared strong and well, save that the circles had come about her eyes once more and that her lovely mouth drooped at the corners. Her voice was low and quite civil but infinitely cold.

"You see, you see!" cried Miss Mannering, when the Princess had left. "Do you wonder that no one can approach her? How—how does she seem to you, Mr. Creighton?"

But I shook my head.

"Don't ask me," I said. "A queen nursing a pain too great for words but holding a calm face to the world, if you like. I don't know. Great heaven, her eyes are the saddest tragedy I ever saw! How she's suffering! And how she must have loved him!"

I rose, still shaking my head.

"I must be going back to Denis," I said. "He's waiting for news of her. Yes, von Altdorf's right—Fate plays."

Once back in the studio, I told Denis all that I had heard and seen, proud that I had so much to give him. He made no comment or remark save an occasional "Yes, yes, man, get on! get on!" when I paused for breath. And when I told him how the Princess had suddenly come into the room where Miss Mannering and I sat talking, he gave a deep voiced "Ah-h-h!" and dragged his chair nearer.

"But, lad, lad!" he cried, when I had made an end, "dear lad, you tell so little! Nothing that I didn't know before. All these things one could take for granted. Tell me the little things, Teddy, how she bore her eyes, and that queen's head of hers. Ah, high in the air, I'll warrant! And was she paler than her wont, lad? And was one little curling lock of her hair loose over the ear—the left ear, as it always is? Had she a flower at her breast? Ah, you've no eyes, Ted! I'd have

known every tiniest thing about her in an instant!"

He rose and went over to the window that gives upon the garden. It was open wide for the sweet spring air to enter, and he stood by it staring out into his lost Paradise for a long time.

"I'll walk in the garden for a while," said he at last. "No one will be there to see me or interrupt. I want to sniff the perfume once more, and—sit on the stone bench." He threw a foot over the window ledge and vaulted down to the turf below.

I took up a pipe and a book to pass the time, but Denis walked up the old gravel path between the straight prim rows of chestnut-trees; and the heavy fragrance of the blossoms above hung over him like the scent of burial flowers.

He walked, head down, eyes fixed upon the ground before him, hands clasped behind his back, so that he came slowly into the little circle of shrubbery that surrounds the fountain, and where stands the cracked old stone bench, without glancing ahead.

Then he raised his eyes and fell a step backward.

"I—beg your—pardon!" said he, very low, and in a queer, breathless voice. "I did n't—know there was any one—here. I—thought I should be alone."

"And I," said the Princess Eleanor from the old stone bench. "Else I should not have come."

"I'll go away at once," said Mallory, not looking at her. "I—won't intrude upon you."

"Just a moment, please!" begged the Princess Eleanor. She rose to her feet to confront him, frowning a little, eyes half closed, her lips with the slightest additional curl as if he were something offensive, unpleasant to see.

"I do not know, sir," she began coldly, "what has been told you relative to—to what occurred on the day before yesterday, or to my sentiments toward you at present—and for all time in the future?"

She spoke as if in question, and paused a moment.

"I think I have—heard it all," said Denis quietly, "or at least quite enough to understand, quite. Of course I'm not surprised," he went on, "at your feeling about it all—I—expected to be—despised, and—all that, for you can't know, probably never will know, how desperately necessary it was to take some immediate action, and how we were forced to lie to you, to impose upon you for your own sake. Ah, I'm not crying for your mercy! I'm not even trying to apologise for what we did. However we hated the task, we knew it was the only thing, and we'd do it again, I think, if the same problem were offered us."

"I can understand, sir," said the Princess, "how Sir Gavin MacKenzie and these other gentlemen—even my Cousin Jessica, might use a deception to save my—health. There is nothing terrible in that. But that you should carry the thing on, day after day, seeing, as you must have seen, what it was

coming to—seeing that I must grow to care for you, letting me care more and more, aye, making me care! till you had me, heart and soul, in your hands. Ah, there's where the awfulness of the thing lies! To think that a man could be so base, so contemptible, so infamous!

"To think that I could have loved such a—such a thing! Ah-h, I could tear the heart from me and stamp upon it, when I think of these past weeks! It's unclean, vile!—I had not supposed that any human being, anything made in God's image could crawl so low, could do such a hideous thing as to mask himself in smooth, fine words, to prate of his honour, *honour* by heaven! to palm himself off upon an unsuspecting woman as her husband, win the greatest, purest love that was ever in the world, and then go back when his day's work was done, back to his—den and laugh, laugh and sneer at what he'd done! Ah, fine sport it must have been for you! Royal times you must have had, those evenings, gloating over what you'd won!

"I only wonder that God whom we're taught is all wise, suffers such things as you to wander about the earth poisoning whomever you touch! Do you think I shall ever be clean from you? Do you think I shall ever pass a day without shuddering to think that I've sat here with you, poured out my heart and soul to you as I've never done to another being, kissed you? Oh-h—you've made the remainder of my life hideous—I only wish I might

die here and now before I live to hate myself the more!"

Mallory raised a white and quivering face. His voice shook when he spoke.

"And you—you thought—you think that I was—playing the lover as well as the husband? You thought I went back to my rooms daily to laugh and sneer?—Eleanor, you sear my very soul! You—ah!—As God lives and loves His world, I've loved you and love you now and must love you till I die with all the heart and soul and body that is mine. If ever I have tried to stammer my love in poor words I could have beaten my tongue for its pitiful halting, stopped my breath for its wretched effort. Words have gone so limping behind my love that they have shamed it, belittled it. Ah, despise me as you will—as you must, Princess, but you cannot kill my love for you. You've called me the lowest of crawling things. You've said that my presence soiled you, left you unclean—Oh, Madame, I am not your husband and I've no right to any kind word, any good will from you, but no love so great as mine has ever soiled any woman, and no such worship has ever degraded her."

"Would you carry your infamy further, sir?" she cried. "Have you not done? Would you insult me again with your pretense of love? 'Love'! As if you knew what that word means!"

"I tell you the truth, Madame," said Denis Mallory patiently. "I would not have you, for

your own sake, believe me worse than I am. I ask nothing of you, not forgiveness, not pity. I've wronged you past all that—though I did it, as did we all, for what I believed to be a good end. But lie to you in the matter of love I did not, nor could have done so had I wished. Can you not see that I must be telling you the truth? that I should gain nothing by lying to you now?"

The Princess shook her head and turned impatiently away from him.

"I can see nothing," said she, "believe nothing, trust nothing, put faith in no human being again. You see what you have done for me with your 'love.'"

"Yes," said he very low. "Yes, I see. My only hope is that time and reflection may, in part at least, undo it. Time is the greatest of healers, Madame, the kindest and most merciful of friends."

"And Time, sir," said the Princess coldly, "the greatest of healers, will, no doubt, quickly efface all traces of this wonderful love you so stubbornly profess."

But Denis looked at her wide-eyed.

"Time efface my love, Madame?" he asked in a wondering tone. "Time efface my love? Why—why—how little you know of love after all, Princess! Shall love die for lack of feeding, like a neglected child? Shall love live only when it's loved? Time efface it? Eternity won't efface it, Madame."

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"Nor brave words prove an honest man, sir!" said she, "as I've reason enough to know."

"Why did you come out in the garden to-day, Madame?" he demanded suddenly, looking into her eyes. "Why did you come to sit upon the old stone bench?"

The Princess flushed from neck to burnished hair.

"Why—why I—came because the day was fine, sir," she murmured. "Because the house tired me. I came—what is it to you, sir, why I sit in my garden? How dare you demand my reasons for doing as I please? Your insolence is in keeping with your other—qualities!"

"As you like, Madame," said he bowing. "And now, before I go, will you let me make an appeal to you?—No, but wait! The appeal is not for myself. I ask for nothing, nothing. I beg only that you permit that greatest of healers, Time, of which we spoke, to teach you that there are good and true men still in the world and that not every one is a—liar and blackguard. Madame, Prince Karl of Novodnia is an honest gentleman who loves you well, nay too well, for he has left his realm in direst peril to come to you—alas too late! I beg that when you have a little recovered from this—this shock, you will listen to him. It is evident that at one time you were willing to give your life to him, even if no great measure of love. Listen to him, Princess, and take the high place in Novodnia

that waits for you. You, who are a queen among women, must be a princess before the world. There will never have been so regal or so kind a princess!"

The Princess Eleanor looked at him, still frowning under puzzled brows, as if she could not make him out.

"Has Prince Karl sent you to make this plea?" she asked. "Is this part of your task? You perform it but ill, sir. To profess a great and lasting love for me one moment, and urge me toward another man the next, is but poor logic, as I understand it? Are you being paid for this new trick as no doubt you were for the old?"

Denis flushed crimson.

"Prince Karl, Madame," said he, "has at no time asked me or sent me to speak for him, and you pay love a sorry compliment to think that it may never be unselfish. I should love you but ill should I not wish for you all the happiness—at whatever cost to me—that fortune can offer. Even were you not another man's wife I know that you could never feel again for me anything but loathing and despite. I am not to be considered at all. But the Prince, Madame, is a gentleman and he loves you. It would give me the nearest approach to content that the world has now to offer if I could know you happy with him and reigning over Novodnia."

The Princess sat staring at the ground and her breathing came a bit fast.

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"That were love indeed, sir," she said in a half whisper.

"And as for payment," he went on, "I have a perverse fancy that you should know the worst of the truth. Sir Gavin and the other gentlemen concerned, chose me to play the part of the Prince because no one of them could bring himself to do it—it was too base. They found me in a café one evening, drunk, as I often was, and told me their plans. They knew me for a good-for-nothing loafer, an ex-soldier of fortune who'd nothing to show for his soldiering but an ill name, an empty pocket and a constant thirst; who made a wretched living by writing for some London papers. They knew that few things were too low for me to undertake, but that I wouldn't be quite low enough to play them false, and they—they offered money—forty pounds a month to do this work. I was drunk, as I've said, and I agreed—wait, wait a moment!—After I'd been with you that first afternoon I refused the money and there's been no question of payment since.—Still there was, once, and for that I shall never forgive myself. That was the basest of all."

The Princess turned wearily away from him.

"It is all of an equal baseness, sir," said she. "You can surprise me with no low details. The life you've lived, what you have been or are or will be, are of no interest to me—I know only that you made me love you with your lying words of honour

and tenderness, with your lying eyes and lying smile, and that now I hate you, despise you, as I hate and despise and loathe myself. Have you done?—for I can bear no more of this.”

“But one thing more, and I have done,” said he, “one very little thing.” He put a hand into his waistcoat breast pocket and drew out a little knot of narrow pink ribbons.

“You wore this,” said he, “upon the breast of your white gown that first day. It came unfastened and fell when you were not looking, and I picked it up and kept it. I have had it ever since. It has never left me night nor day.”

He held out the little knot of ribbon toward her, but the Princess shrank back.

“I could not touch it, sir,” said she.

His hand shook and the knot of ribbon fell to the ground at their feet. He stooped and picked it up quickly, and held it between his hands at his breast. The Princess saw his face and looked away.

Then he stood aside and bowed.

“If I have your permission, Madame,” said he in a very low voice, “I will go. I shall not intrude upon you nor try to see you again.”

The Princess Eleanor, up in her chamber, pulled aside the white curtains and looked down into the garden. The old stone bench was hidden by shrubbery, but the fountain gleamed through the new leaves with a trickle and spurt of running water.

“And now,” said the Princess Eleanor in a low,

tired voice, "now I have hurt you as much as you have hurt me. Now I've made you suffer as much as you made me suffer, and you'll hate me as I—as I—hate you, for no man can ever forgive what I have said to you, the insults I've heaped upon you. They'll burn you so long as you live, Denis.—'Denis'? I like your new name, Carlo, it's Irish, is n't it?—as the lying speeches you've made to me must burn always; as, God pity me, the love I bear you must burn in my shamed heart till I die!" cried the Princess Eleanor, and fell to sobbing most bitterly.

CHAPTER XV

BUT meanwhile I had grown tired of waiting for Denis to finish his walk in the garden—he seemed so long over it—and at last went off grumbling to my rooms in the Boulevard Montparnasse to dress, for I was dining across the river with some friends.

We dined at Durand's in the Place de la Madeleine, and I saw the others into their cabs outside the door at something like ten o'clock or a bit after. Then I turned down the rue Royale toward the Place de la Concorde, for I'd some notion of dropping in at Maxim's, but the Taverne Royale looked so bright and gay and attractive as I passed, and the refrain of a waltz which the Spanish orchestra was playing, sounded so alluring, that I turned in there instead and looked about for a vacant table. The big salle was nearly full, but I found a table at last in the forward corner, and made my way over to it through the crowd of late diners and smartly dressed loungers who were listening to the music.

The table at my left was surrounded by a group of young Frenchmen of the well-to-do *étudiant* type, that is to say, grown children, irrepressible in spirits and mischief. They seemed to have picked for the temporary butt of their silly and ill-natured

jokes, a man who sat alone at the little table on my right, a very German looking person of forty or thereabouts, with red full cheeks and pursy eyes and very fiercely turned up moustaches a l'Empereur Guillaume.

A German may, nowadays, work among the rapins of a Latin quarter studio, subject to little or no insult, so common has he become, but these particular young ruffians of the Taverne Royale seemed determined to avenge poor wreath hung Strasbourg, there in the Place de la Concorde, and were making things interesting in a quiet but sufficiently audible manner for the gentleman with the up-turned moustaches.

As for me, I was trying to determine where I had seen him before. His face had an oddly familiar look. I knew no end of Germans. I had hobnobbed with them from Bremen to the forest, and from Frankfür't to Vienna, but I could place this man nowhere in the list.

He was drinking Bière de Munich—Spatenbraü—in great half litre mugs which he ground solemnly upon the table, with that little rotary motion, before raising to his lips. His left eyelid had a chronic droop that gave him a rather sinister look, and he wore a monocle over that eye. Where had I seen that drooping eyelid?

I leaned over and begged him for a match—there was no box upon my table—and he turned to me with a sort of eagerness. The Frenchmen had an-

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nayed him despite his German stolidity. I made some commonplace remark, I remember, about the music or the weather, and he answered with an apparent delight at hearing his mother tongue. He dropped the monocle from his eye as he spoke, and I had to lower my gaze swiftly and choke back the exclamation that rose to my lips, for I knew him now. It was the eye-glass that had deceived me.

Then I set in, unashamedly, to pump the man, on the chance that among many lies there might be a truth or a hint of value.

It was rather good sport, for he had no notion, whatever, that we had met—"in a way o' speakin' " as MacKenzie would say—before.

Was he in Paris merely as a traveller then?

Yes, he was here for a short time only. He was from Vienna. "And that," said I inwardly, "is indirectly true." His name was Swartzkopfen—"not by any chance von Steinbrücke?" said I again—to myself. My name was Jenkins and I was from Manchester where I manufactured toys. Herr von Swartzkopfen was in Paris for no long stop then?

No, oh no, he was here on a mission. "True again," thought I—a mission which would be consummated within the next two or three days.

"The devil it will!" said I to myself. "I'd give something to know just what the mission is, my friend." After which, certain events must determine his movements for the next fortnight.

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And he had found pleasant quarters while in the city? He was stopping at one of the hotels, of course?

But here Herr Swartzkopfen von Steinbrücke caressed the fierce moustaches and murmured something vague about friends on the other side of the river, and I changed the topic to a safer, remoter one, for it would n't do at all to alarm the man. There might still be something wormed out of him unawares.

We talked for a long time of many things—"shoes and ships and sealing wax and cabbages and kings"—and I found Herr von Steinbrücke, ex-card sharper, sometime blackmailer, refugee from Austrian justice, and presently Pavelovitch catspaw, interesting in the extreme.

He told me tales, wondrous tales! If only I could put them upon paper! Tales of queer happenings at Vienna, at Trieste, at Salzburg, at Weisbaden, tales of carelessly-cloaked great names—I had now shunted him from Spatenbrau to more potent and fiery things, so that his tongue was loosened and his face grew redder. He told me tales of his own deeds, boastfully and with no seeming shame—he was drinking brandy now—deeds unspeakable for utter blackguardism; and I smiled and shoved the little decanter toward him. He told me bits of court gossip from Vienna, of strange bargains made and promises given, of strange plans afoot for a repainting of the map of Europe when the beloved

old Emperor should come to his death. By my faith the press of the civilised world would have burned the next morning with startling news could those rambling guttural Viennese accents have reached its ears!

And at last, when the husky voice had grown lower and had come to wandering into silly repetitions and foolish pleasantries, I steered the talk again—with inward trembling—to the present time.

Doubtless his mission in Paris was connected with some of these great folk, matters to be trusted only to one old in craft and secret business?

The foolish head wagged knowingly and that sinister left eyelid drooped lower.

His mission, by Heaven, was important enough, if any one should ask you! It had to do with a prince! Herr Gott, yes! but mind you the prince was not to be a prince long! Eh, strange things happened sometimes when two men wanted the same seat! I think I jumped at this—— No, he was not to be a prince long. He would n't find it convenient to return to his throne. There was a chuckling laugh here. Ah, then, this prince was in Paris?

Aye, he was in Paris, the silly fool! And in Paris he was to remain—Paris, or—somewhere—— He was n't going home—and there was another chuckling laugh.

So then Denis was wrong! It was the Prince

who was to be kidnapped or killed after all! I turned again to the drunken Austrian eagerly.

But surely putting princes out of the way had its elements of danger!

The Austrian straightened up in his chair with a jerk, and drew his brows together with a great effort of mental concentration. It was as if he realised that he had made a rash slip and must be cautious.

Putting princes out of the way? Who talked of putting princes out of the way? I was mad! What had he to do with princes? And he rapped loudly upon the table for his addition.

There was nothing more to be made out of him, it seemed, but I went to the door with him, talking pleasantly the while, and stood upon the curb while he called a cab.

"There'll be no harm in just making a note of where you lodge, my friend," said I to myself.

He stumbled into the fiacre, told the cocher to drive to the devil, and off they dashed with a parting wave of the hand to me.

"But you don't give me the slip so easily as all that," I protested, and was after them, in an instant, with another cab.

"Follow that fiacre with the grey horse," said I to my cocher, "and a Louis if you don't lose sight of it, wherever it goes!"

We were caught in a jam of traffic at the foot of the rue Royale, but I made out the cab with the

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grey horse some little way ahead of us, caught as well.

Then presently we were off, across the Place de la Concorde and up the Champs Élysées.

"What!" said I, "up here? I should have thought you'd keep closer to the prey, man, somewhere on the other side of the river."

We went far up the Champs Élysées, through the Place de l'Étoile and into the Avenue Kléber. "Upon my word, von Steinbrücke, you're living well!" thought I.

Then at last, the fiacre with the grey horse pulled up before one of the high imposing houses that line the avenue, and—a thin little man with a great beard politely assisted his corpulent and bejewelled wife to alight and they rang the bell at the big iron grille.

I threw myself back upon the cushions. It was that jam in the rue Royale that had done for us, and one grey horse looks much like another when you've lost sight of the first for a moment.

"81, Boulevard Montparnasse!" I growled to the cocher and called myself unpleasant names all the long way home.

In the Boulevard Montparnasse I changed my mind, and told the cocher to go up to the rue Boissonade, for I'd left in Mallory's studio a little notebook that I should be wanting early in the morning.

"I shall probably have to knock poor Denis up," said I with a laugh, as I rang and waited for the

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conciérge's wire cordon to unlock the gate in the iron fence. "He'll have turned in by now."

He had n't turned in, though. That was evident, for there was a bright light in the studio. I banged at the door, and hearing no reply, opened it—it was seldom locked—and went in.

The reek of absinthe struck me in the face as soon as the door was open. There was, as I have said, a bright light. It came from the big overhead lamp with its reflectors that threw a glare down upon what was beneath.

The forward end of the room seemed full of a huddled mass of broken furniture; a carved table, two chairs smashed to bits—they must have been thrown there violently—an easel, and some of the heavier articles that had hung upon the wall. There were two broken glasses and a carafe upon the floor, and an overturned absinthe bottle lay in a little pool of its former contents.

But what drew from me a cry of horror and dread was not the heap of smashed furniture nor the broken glasses, nor the sickening smell of absinthe, but something else.

Denis lay stretched along the floor, face down, his head toward the débris at the end of the room. One arm, the right one, lay out before him, a sabre in its clenched hand. Three or four inches were broken from the sabre's point, and the heap of chairs and other things were chopped and hacked as if with an axe.

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His left arm lay bent under his head, and he was quite still.

Poor old Denis! The walls had come together again, and tried to catch him! Had they done it?

I ran to him, and turned him over on his back. His jaw dropped as the head fell backward, and I think my heart quite stopped beating. There was a deep cut over one eye, from which the blood had run freely and was caked upon his brow and down across one cheek. He must have struck the table edge or a chair when he fell.

I tore his clenched fingers from the sabre's hilt, and loosened his collar. Then I found some water and dashed it into his face again and again, covering his mouth lest it should drown him. There was no sign of life, and my heart stopped again, but I tore off my coat and hat and set to work furiously.

"He's not dead!" I cried. "By heaven he *sha' n't* die!"

And at last, after I had worked over him for quite ten or fifteen minutes, I suppose,—it seemed hours—his eyelids quivered and twitched and he began to gasp feebly and to move his lips. I put forth all my strength and lifted him to the divan, and—because I could find nothing else—I forced between his teeth a little of the absinthe that remained in the overturned bottle.

He moved his head from side to side and his eyes unclosed.

"They — they did n't catch me?" he whis-

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pered feebly. "They did n't — catch me — the walls?"

"No, dear old chap!" said I, "they did n't catch you, thank God! nor shall while I'm alive to prevent it! We won't give them another chance!"

"Why it's—it's Teddy!" he murmured with a weak surprise, "dear lad, how came you here?—Ah, I've had a time, Teddy! the very devil of a time! They—they nearly had me, Teddy, lad."

"They sha' n't have another chance, Denis," said I again, and slipped an arm under him to raise his head. "Hello, what the deuce is this?"

The left hand that had lain bent under his face upon the floor, still held clutched in its fingers a little knot of narrow pink ribbons, such as women love to wear about them here and there — Where it's monstrous becoming, I protest.

"Why, it's nothing, dear lad," he whispered, "just nothing at all—a rag, a foolish thing I—I came by accidentally. It means nothing—throw it away for me, Teddy. Why should I be holding to it? Nay, nay!" as I made to take it from his fingers, "let it be, lad, I'll—I'll throw it away myself. You need n't bother. A bit o' pink ribbon! God in Heaven, a bit o' pink ribbon! What's a bit o' pink ribbon to a man, Ted? Hold me up to you, lad, I'm—most outrageous tired—and—sleepy."

CHAPTER XVI

WE sat, as was still our custom, in the studio, the five of us, MacKenzie and the Prince—your pardon, princes surely have precedence over birthday knights—the Prince and MacKenzie, then, von Altdorf, Denis and I.

The Prince wore an eager and happy air, albeit a trifle nervous, for he was at last to have his interview with the Princess Eleanor that evening. Colonel von Altdorf's habitual anxiety seemed to have left him in view of his master's prospective departure for Novodnia. Denis, with a somewhat pallid cheek and a patch of plaster over one temple, as witnesses of last night's work, seemed much as ever, though silent and smiling little.

I was telling them of my meeting with Herr von Steinbrücke, and of von Steinbrücke's boasts that his mission in Paris was in two or three days to be fulfilled.

"But in less than two or three days," said von Altdorf, "the Prince will be far from Paris and well on his way to Novodnia, thank God! Steinbrücke is too late for once in his life," and he lay back in his chair with a sigh of relief.

Then, before any one could answer him, there

came from outside swift footsteps, as of one running, and a noise at the door as if some one had fallen against it. I, who sat nearest, sprang to the door and threw it open and then fell back with a cry of alarm.

The woman who clung to the doorway white and shaking, gasping for breath, was Miss Jessica Mannering. She wore no hat, and the hair was blown loose about her face. Her eyes were very wide and terror-stricken and her breath came in great dry sobs as if she had been running a long distance.

She pushed by me into the room.

"They've got the—Princess!" she cried weakly. "They've got the—Princess! Oh, don't you—hear me? They've got the—Princess!" She dropped down suddenly upon the floor by the great divan, and her head fell forward among the cushions.

The Prince, von Altdorf and MacKenzie sat in their chairs like dead men, staring. And I stood by the open door, saying over and over with a tongue that took no heed of itself, "They've got the Princess! They've got the Princess!"

But Denis sprang quickly to the girl's side and raised her head in his arms. His face was keen and eager and alert. His eyes seemed almost glad, flashed with their old quick fire as he bent over Miss Mannering.

The girl's head moved weakly back and forth upon his shoulder, and her eyelids fluttered. She had not fainted, but she was perilously near it.

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Mallory's face rose with a jerk.

"The flask, lad!" said he. "Look sharp!"

I forced my stubborn legs from their trance at last, and brought him a flask from the mantel-shelf. He forced some of the liquor between the girl's teeth, and her eyes opened slowly, and a bit of colour came to her cheeks.

"That's better!" said Denis, smiling down cheerfully, "that's better! Just a bit more, now."

"Oh, they've got—the Princess!" she whispered, and turned her face with a little moan so that it was hidden against his breast.

"Aye!" said Denis, soft as a woman. "Aye, we know, we know. Never you fear! We'll get her back—just a drop more of the brandy, now — Aye, they've got the Princess. When you're strong enough, tell us all you know—take your time—just a drop more before you begin. Now then!"

The girl raised herself, holding to his arm, till she was half upon her knees, half resting against him. His arm held her waist, and her head lay against his shoulder. She was still very weak and trembling and breathless.

"They—they took her—away in—in a cab," she whispered. "They told her—a lying tale about—about the Prince. I was away—shopping. I reached home only a few moments ago, and—and the servants told me."

She paused, breathless, and took a sip from the flask that Denis held to her lips.

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"A man came—came to the house—the servants say, a tall fair man with an eye-glass ——"

"Von Steinbrücke, damn him!" cried the Prince.

Denis held up a warning hand.

"——and——and said that the—Prince was very—ill, had been hurt in a carriage accident and might—die, that he was lying in his apartments and that Colonel von Altdorf was—was with him. The man said that the Prince begged she would—come to him at once—before he died ——"

"Oh, what a trick!" groaned the Prince, his hands over his face. "What a damnable black-guardly trick!"

"——She—she waited only to take a wrap and a hat and—went with him. He had a carriage waiting. The servants say there was one other man in the carriage, a smaller man. They—they drove away quickly—and that's—that's all! Oh, Mr. Mallory! Think of her in those men's clutches! Can't you save her?" and the poor young woman broke down in a most piteous fit of weeping with her face upon Mallory's shoulder.

"Save her?" he cried gently, stroking the loosened black hair, "why, yes, yes, of course, we'll save her! Never fear, we'll save her right enough."

He lifted the girl to the divan and made a sign to von Altdorf to come to her there—which seemed a task much to that gentleman's liking. Then he

rose and stood in the centre of the room thinking rapidly.

"Save her?" he cried again, but as if to himself. "Aye, we'll save her! But what to do? What to do? Those fools of servants won't have noticed anything that could help us, and Steinbrücke's no such fool as to have taken a cab from any stand near here. The police? No, the police are out of the question. The thing mustn't get abroad. Steinbrücke knows that. Will he take her out of Paris, I wonder? Ted, Ted, if only you'd managed to trace the man to his lodgings! Oh, Teddy, you're no detective!"

He walked up and down the room for some minutes, head bent, brow creased and hands smiting softly together. We all watched him and waited for him to speak.

I think his taking the lead, thus at once, and without question or hesitation, moved us to no surprise—if we thought of it at all—but rather seemed most natural. Even old MacKenzie watched his face with an anxious eye; and from the divan, Colonel von Altdorf's ministrations as nurse and comforter, became absent and perfunctory while his eyes followed the restless march up and down the room.

"I must see the servants," he said after awhile. "They may have noticed something about the fiacre, the horse's colour, the look of the cocher, something to give us a clue. It's just possible."

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He halted before the divan.

"You 've a cipher code for telegraphing to trustworthy friends in Novodnia?" he demanded.

"Naturally," said Colonel von Altdorf, a bit piqued that he should be questioned about so elementary a precaution.

"Then listen, man!" cried Denis swiftly. "You'll telegraph at once to the best man you have down there, the very best, to intercept any communications they can, between Georgias and von Steinbrücke, bribe Georgias' servants, do anything possible to find out where Steinbrücke is now, for where he is the Princess will be. Tell them to spare no pains and to work quickly. It's our best hope, their efforts. Ted, you'll come with me to the house—no, no, not the door, the window and the garden, it's quickest. We must find if the servants have taken notice of Steinbrücke's fiacre; and then you're to prowl about the city looking out for it. Sir Gavin, you'll take care of Miss Mannering."

The girl raised her face at the mention of her name and reached an arm toward him. He dropped one knee beside the divan and smiled into her eyes.

"Everything will be done that men can do," said he gently. "We'll have her back again before you know it. You mustn't worry nor break down nor fall ill, because we shall need you. Go home now with Sir Gavin and rest. We've all much to do."

Then he came over to me at the little window and we ran up through the garden to the old convent.

The servants were quite as stupid as one could have expected. No, they had noticed nothing peculiar about the fiacre. Why should one notice a fiacre? They were all alike, *parbleu*!

But the gentleman, he had an eye-glass, a monocle in the left eye, and spoke French with an accent——

"Yes, yes!" cried Denis impatiently, "we know all about the gentleman and his eye-glass! What sort of a fiacre? Did no one notice the horse, what colour was it?"

But here, a gardener who had been repairing the spikes on top of the high wall near the entrance, declared that the horse had been grey, with a rat tail, a very old and tired horse.

"Our friend Steinbrücke seems to have a certain fancy for grey horses," observed Denis Mallory. "A grey horse! Good, so far! And the cocher, was he of the *Compagnie Générale* or the *Compagnie l'Urbaine*? In other words did he wear a dark coat and a black hat, or a tan coat and a white hat?"

"A black hat." The gardener was quite positive. The cocher had been of the *Compagnie Générale*. And there were no yellow markings on the fiacre, which was an old one, old as the grey horse and the grey cocher. Anything else? No, nothing—but

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yes, on second thought—the cocher had worn a mourning band about his left arm.

Further than this we could extract nothing from the two or three servants who had seen the Princess' departure, save that the fiacre, hood raised, had driven off up the rue Denfert Rochereau toward the Place du Lion—"which means nothing," commented Denis Mallory. "They might go in any direction to elude a possible pursuit. Ted, you must take a fiacre and cover the city, so far as you can, passing all the cab ranks possible, on the watch for a battered old voiture of the Compagnie Générale, a voiture with an old grey horse and an old grey cocher who wears a mourning badge. The only quarter you need not search is this one about us—Steinbrücke's no fool. If you find the man bring him here at once and don't let him out of sight till I've seen him. As for me I'm off to see a friend of mine, a police official, whom I did a good turn once. I said the police were out of the question, and so they are, in the usual way, but I think I can find if our friends leave Paris, without any one knowing save a very few people who'll never tell. My official will have all the outgoing trains watched, but he'll have it done quite unofficially. There's nothing like a friend in the police, Teddy. Off with you now! We must lose no time."

I should be but wearisome were I to go into the details of my exhaustive search for the rest of that day and the whole of the two days following. I

made a plan of the city and covered it patiently, avenue by avenue, boulevard by boulevard, scrutinising each cab rank, as I passed, with an anxious, hopeful eye. It seemed that half the cab horses in Paris were grey and half the cochers old. Nay, by the second day I did better. I went to every stable of the Compagnie Générale and asked for a voiture and a cocher which would answer my description. And many a fruitless errand I was sent upon, too, but I never found the old colignon with the mourning band and the battered fiacre.

Colonel von Altdorf had, meanwhile, telegraphed instructions to trusty colleagues in Novodnia, the fullest of instructions, and was employing his time, till a reply might come, with guarding and reassuring the Prince, who, poor gentleman, was almost beside himself with grief and impotent fear for his wife's safety. He would have been off alone in a mad search for her had we let him out of our sight for a moment. Aye, he loved his wife, did Karl of Novodnia, and it nearly broke his heart to sit still, holding his hands, while she was, God knew where, in the power of that devil Steinbrücke.

Denis had gone immediately to his friend of the police, and no train left Paris from any station but was quietly and unobtrusively watched. Indeed, no vehicle passed by road out of any of the gates without examination. Denis's service to the police official must have been of consequence.

Further than this, he acted most curiously. He

spent little time at the studio, we saw him at infrequent intervals, but appeared to pass his hours loafing about the terrasses of cafés, with students and cocottes. I saw him several times as I was driving about on my fruitless search, once in Montmartre, once on the Boulevard Sevastopol and once on the Boul' Miche' at the d'Harcourt. This last time I pulled up at the curb and signalled to him. He was sitting at a little table surrounded by the sort that frequents this particular café—and it is the worst sort of the whole Boulevard St. Michel.—Well, it was at the end of a long hard day wholly without results, and I suppose I was out of temper with fatigue and disappointment. I suppose I spoke sharply to him—he had seemed so care free and at his ease there amongst vauriens and strumpets. His eyes flashed up at me an instant, as he stood by the wheel, an angry flash. I half raised my arm. Then he laughed.

“You're a good old chap, Teddy,” said he, “and you're doing good work, but you've small imagination. Man, I've set an army of detectives at work throughout Paris that not the whole police of the continent of Europe could equal. Half the lazy, loafing rascals in the city, and nearly all their lady-friends, are on the lookout for von Steinbrücke. They'll find him if he's here. Ah, Ted, there come times when a wasted life turns up trumps. Make to yourself friends o' the mammon of unrighteousness, Teddy, it may stand you in.—Run away home

now, I'm busy. I've the very littlest trace of a clue, the very littlest, but still a clue. Found your cocher yet? No? I did n't expect you would. Steinbrücke's no fool, eh? Run along, now."

And that night as we sat planning and comparing notes in the studio, Denis for once among us, a long telegram in cipher came to von Altdorf, several pages of it.

"Good old Czerowitz!" he cried. "I knew Czerowitz would do the work. See, he's sent the thing from Vienna! That means he would n't risk the wires from Novodni or Belgrade, but had a messenger go to Vienna and telegraph from there—good old Czerowitz!"

Then he sat down at Denis's table with pen and paper and translated the cipher.

"'Message to Georgias from Paris, via Vienna Belgrade and Novodni, to Makarin in the hills,'" he said presently. "'Wire cut—by my orders—between Novodni and Makarin—message read only by—trustworthy—operator—message follows——' 'She is—in our hands—— He, well guarded—we remain—Paris till—orders from you—— Safe hiding place"—end of message—wires cut or guarded—borders watched—believe communications successfully—broken—address Hoffmeyer, Bristol, Vienna.'"

Von Altdorf threw down his pen and beat upon the table with his fist.

"Sir," he cried, turning to the Prince, "I recom-

mend Commandant Czerowitz for advancement in your service. He's a man in a million! The thing could n't have been better done!"

But the Prince's eyes were wide and eager.

"She's in Paris then?" said he. "She's in Paris? Thank God! We shall find her! Gentlemen, we *must* find her!"

Denis nodded from his corner.

"We'll find her, sir," he promised.

But old MacKensie, stiff and gloomy on the divan, shook his big head and blew a cloud of smoke from his briar.

"Will ye though?" he growled. "Paris is a wide covert, my lad, an' yon villain of an Austrian is no fool! Look to your work if ye'd outwit him."

And indeed Denis's promise seemed a rash one, for day after day went by and we made no progress. Von Altdorf continued to hear from Novodnia through his agent at Vienna. Georgias's communications with von Steinbrücke seemed definitely to have been interrupted. The latter must have suspected that something was wrong, for he ceased, after a time, sending messages, but of his whereabouts in Paris we gained no clue.

Of Denis we saw little. He was off upon searches and consultations all of the day and most of the night, and of what he was doing he saw fit to tell us nothing. That he was working desperately we knew, and that the strain and anxiety were telling upon him was only too apparent, for he grew thin-

ner and paler day by day, and his eyes took on a look that I dreaded to see.

Ah well, it was a bad week for us all.

But on the fifth day after the Princess Eleanor's capture, our waiting was brought to a sudden end.

CHAPTER XVII

COLONEL VON ALTDORF, passing along the Boulevard des Italiens, where he had been making some necessary purchases, ran upon Denis who was engaged in certain of his secret investigations, and the two walked down together to the Place de l'Opéra.

"We might stop in at the Café de la Paix for a moment," suggested von Altdorf. "I'm fagged a bit, and you look quite done up. Take it easier, lad, fretting yourself to death won't do any good. I know it's a bad enough business, but—— Great God in Heaven!—Here, turn your back quickly. —No, come around in front. Look sharp, man, look sharp!"

They had been standing at the corner of the wide terrasse of the Café de la Paix which fronts both the Boulevard and the rue Auber. The triple tier of little tables on the Boulevard side is always crowded of an afternoon, and was at this time, but on the side facing the rue Auber there are commonly but few people, the overflow from the front.

Colonel von Altdorf dragged Denis along the Boulevard side till they were out of sight from the tables upon the rue Auber. His voice shook a bit with excitement when he spoke.

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"Listen!" said he, "the tall light-haired man with the eye-glass sitting in the rear row of tables on the rue Auber terrasse is Baron von Steinbrücke. He's never seen you and of course won't know who you are. When he leaves, shadow him. Do n't lose sight of him, for your life. The whole game is in our hands, now, if you succeed in tracking him to his quarters. Here, take a seat at this table near the corner, against the wall. You can see him from here but he can't see you. I'm going to have a little chat with him. It can't do any harm, and may be amusing. I shall go away soon. When he sees me out of sight, he'll bolt. Then's your chance."

Denis seated himself at the little table against the wall and ordered a vermouth sec, and Colonel von Altdorf strolled around the corner swinging his stick and nonchalantly searching for a place. His eye lit up with genuine pleasure as he caught sight of the gentleman with the eye-glass, and he advanced with outstretched hand.

"What, you in Paris, my dear Baron?" he cried in a tone of delighted surprise. "And you never looked me up!" he protested sorrowfully as he dropped into a chair. "Ah, that was n't kind!"

The light-haired gentleman with the eye-glass took one quick breath and his drooping left eyelid hung a bit lower. He licked his lips as if he found them suddenly dry, but the florid colour in his cheeks never deepened or paled, and presently he smiled.

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"Well, you see," he began, slowly and as if with some reluctance, "you see, my dear Colonel, I'm not here in propria persona, as it were. I'm here on important business—business connected with the Prince," he added maliciously.

"Ah?" said the Colonel in a pleasant tone.

"He left Novodnia rather—er suddenly," commented the light-haired gentleman with the eyeglass.

"Why yes," said von Altdorf, "rather suddenly as you say.—Still a prince may do as he will. Besides, he wanted to see me upon matters of importance. And Paris in the spring-time is n't a bad place to spend a fortnight."

"And the—er lady?" suggested von Steinbrücke in a deprecatory tone.

Von Altdorf laughed.

"To be sure!" he cried, "the lady! We must n't forget the love affair! Ah, well, sha' n't a young man have his little flirtations, even if he's a prince? Jeunesse, jeunesse! We also were young, once, Baron."

Baron von Steinbrücke took a long draught of beer from the mug before him, and that sinister left eyelid drooped.

"Still, when we were young," he objected, "we didn't call love-making with our wives, flirtation, did we?"

Von Altdorf allowed himself another laugh.

"Wives? wives?" he cried. "Come, my dear

Baron, you're too old a fox to have believed that silly tale of the Prince's marriage! That was Pavelovitch talk, political lies. Why, surely if the Prince were married to this—or lady, he'd not have gone back to Novodnia last night alone! He'd have taken her with him—even if he had to wait a bit till she was ready."

The beer mug clattered slightly upon the marble top of the little table, but Baron von Steinbrücke's smile was undisturbed.

"The Prince gone back?" he enquired. "Why then my man who watches the Prince's lodgings must be a shocking liar, mustn't he? for he says the Prince is still very much here."

"But you see," protested Colonel von Altdorf, "you see that man is in my pay. He's hardly a reliable spy. I'd discharge him if I were you, Baron."

Baron von Steinbrücke smiled appreciatively and shook his head.

"No," said he, still smiling, "no, it won't do, my friend. Were I a younger man, or had n't we met before, I might be disturbed, but—no, it won't do. Come, Colonel, we beat about the bush. Why not be frank? I've got your Princess—or at least the lady that Karl wants to make a princess. I've got her in safe-keeping, and I shall hold her there as long as I like."

"And that," suggested the Colonel, "that will be as long ——"

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"As long as it is necessary to keep Prince Karl out of Novodnia, for he'll never go back there with his wife in durance. He'll search till he's found her. Meanwhile—why meanwhile there's an empty seat in the palace at Novodni, Colonel, and a populace very, very discontented at the notion of a foreign commoner princess, and none too pleased at the Prince's absence, perhaps none too pleased with the Prince in any event. Shall the seat remain empty, my friend? There's a man in the mountains would fill it well. Ah, we've the upper hand of you this time, Colonel."

Colonel von Altdorf leaned over the little table and smiled pleasantly into the Austrian's eyes.

"You've stated the conditions, Baron," said he; "that is you've stated them from your point of view—I hold another—but they were to lead up to something. The proposition, my friend?"

Baron von Steinbrücke removed his eye-glass and polished it with some care. He showed the slightest trace of nervousness, the very slightest possible.

"Why, as for that," said he with a shrug, "I've no great love for George and his crew."

"Ah!" breathed Colonel von Altdorf. "You'd sell out? I thought so. And the—er price?"

Von Steinbrücke gave a little nervous laugh, it would seem of relief.

"It's not prohibitive," said he lightly. "A warm berth at court, enough to pay one's little gaming debts, to keep against one's old age. Herr

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Gott ! shall a man serve a mob of bandits, of prowling pretenders when he might take the place his merits deserve in a reigning Prince's train ? Come, give me countenance at court and an income, and we'll send Georgias to the devil ! I'm tired of sneaking and intrigue. Let Karl have his nestmate—by heaven I like his taste, she's a beauty ! And we'll all go back to Novodni for the coronation."

Colonel von Altdorf appeared to be meditating.

"And our warrant that you'll be faithful to us ?" he enquired presently. "How are we to know sure that you won't sell us out in turn to Georgias or some one else ?"

"My word of honour," said the Baron von Steinbrücke pompously.

Von Altdorf laughed.

"Come, come, Baron !" he cried.

The Baron flushed purple and cursed softly to himself.

Colonel von Altdorf leaned once more over the little table, his elbows among the glasses and saucers.

"I have known you, Baron," said he slowly, "for many years. I knew of you for many years before ever I saw you, and in all that time I have never heard any good of you, nothing but bad faith, dishonour and disgrace. I know you for liar, card-cheat, blackmailer, husband of convenience—Keep your hands down, Baron von Steinbrücke ! this is a conspicuous corner—catspaw for criminals

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in high places whose own hands must be concealed, pander to a rotten nobility, blackguard in general ! You've won money by sharp play from your own guests in your own house. You've trapped young girls and turned them loose afterward upon the streets. You've compromised women of rank and demanded money of them to hold your tongue. There's been no deed so vile, so foul that you would n't do it for a price—— And now you ask Prince Karl of Novodnia for a place in his court and offer your word of honour—honour forsooth !—that you will be his faithful subject !

“I do n't know, sir, why a God, whom we are taught is all wise, allows such swine as you to wander and root upon the earth ; possibly for an example to men of honour of how low human nature without that honour may be brought. As for Prince Karl and us, his friends, we want none of you save as an enemy. I wish Georgias joy of your loyalty.”

The Austrian's hand shook upon his beer mug and his face writhed and twisted in a snarl almost canine. He dared not, as von Altdorf well knew, provoke a brawl in front of the Café de la Paix. He dared not strike with the heavy beer mug at which his fingers clutched longingly. He dared not even raise his voice, with the two dapper looking gendarmes standing at ease half a dozen paces from where he sat.

“By heaven, you'll pay for this !” he cried,

softly, and his voice trembled with rage. "You'll pay for the pleasure of sitting here and blackguarding me as you like. I've got the woman, curse you! She'll be the worse for your fine speech, my Colonel! She'll pay!"

Colonel von Altdorf's face set all at once hard and stern, and his eyes glowed from under drawn brows.

"No, she won't," said he, "no, she won't, my blackleg! What you're after is to keep Prince Karl out of Novodnia. If you kill the Princess there is nothing left to prevent him from returning. If you harm her in any littlest way you'll be hounded over the continent of Europe, aye, and over as many continents as lie between seas, till you're dead. You know Karl as well as I do. Happy, with a restored and unhurt wife, he may prove a forgiving or a careless foe, but bring any harm to this woman, and God have mercy on your soul, von Steinbrücke, Karl of Novodnia will have none on your body, nor Karl's friends or servants either. Abduction as a political trick is all very well, but see you to it that it goes no further. And now I'll be moving on. I saw you here, von Steinbrücke, and took it into my head to have a bit of chat with you. The chat has been quite delightful. It has relieved a congested temper. Good-afternoon, my adventurous friend—oh, and a word of warning! Stick to beer when you're out of an evening. Hotter liquors muddle the judgment. Jenkins of

Manchester tells queer tales of you—— Good-afternoon, Herr Baron.”

He caught one glance at the Austrian’s face when Jenkins of Manchester was mentioned, and the glance seemed to amuse him. Then he yawned slightly, took up his stick and gloves and moved out to the curb.

An omnibus bound for the Place St. Michel came down the rue Auber and halted at the corner to wait for a chance to cross the crowded Boulevard. Von Altdorf stepped upon the platform and mounted to the Imperiale, where he sat smiling and contented while the clumsy vehicle rolled down the Avenue de l’Opéra. Herr von Steinbrücke gazed after it with open mouth.

CHAPTER XVIII

VON ALTDORF changed at the foot of the Avenue de l'Opéra, from the omnibus to a cab, and came directly to the studio in the rue Boissonade where he told us all that had occurred.

"I suppose I was foolish to speak to the man," he admitted, "and more foolish still to blackguard him, but it was a chance I could n't resist. After all, angry though he is, he won't dare harm the Princess, and besides, if Denis tracks him home, we should be able to storm the place and carry her off to-night."

"God send Denis does n't lose track of him!" said I.

"Never you fear for Denis," cried von Altdorf. "Denis won't lose him. You should have seen Denis's face when we caught sight of the man! Oh, no, Denis will track him right enough."

He stopped a moment to laugh.

"Eh, but you should have seen Steinbrücke when I was telling him my frank opinion of his virtues! He'd have given years of his life to brain me with his beer mug. I'll confess that my object in speaking to him was n't to pick a quarrel. I thought something might be gotten out of him, that he

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might be bought off for a sum, and the Princess rescued at once. That would have been worth while. Still, we shall get her away promptly. I feel sure of that. It all rests with Denis, and by heaven it could n't rest with a better man! Of course Steinbrücke bolted for home the moment I was out of sight. He'd be expecting me to come back and follow him. That's why I took an omnibus instead of a cab. He could see me far down the avenue. He'll never be thinking of another man. Denis should be here in an hour or so if Steinbrücke went directly to his lodgings."

We sat, excitedly talking the matter over, speculating as to Denis's probable success and as to how we were to go about a rescue, when there came a knock at the door, a slow timid knock.

"That will never be he," said I. "He would n't knock. He'd come in at once." I went to the door and opened it, and a young Frenchwoman asked for Monsieur Denis. She pronounced the name after the French fashion and for an instant I was puzzled, not recognising it at all.

"No," said I, "there's no one of that name here. This is Monsieur Mallory's studio."

"Mais si, si!" insisted the girl. "M. Mallory, M. Denis Mallory—St. Denis!"

And I remembered that Denis's friends of the Quarter called him "St. Denis."

I told her that Denis was away at the moment but that we expected him soon, and she came in to

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wait, saying her business was important. She sat in a corner of the divan, eyeing us distrustfully and answering with a yes or a no to the civil questions we put.

She must once have been an unusually beautiful girl, even for her class where there are many beauties, but illness or dissipation had hollowed her eyes and cheeks, and drawn lines in her face. She coughed from time to time, and in each of her thin cheeks was a spot of bright colour.

"Consumption!" observed old MacKenzie behind his hand. "Gallopin' consumption! Thousands of them have it. Poor body! she's near the end of her strength."

Then, presently, there was a quick rattle of wheels in the street outside, that ceased as quickly. I ran to the window and peered out.

"It's he!" said I. "It's he, and I'll swear he's been successful for he's laughing! He chucked the concierge under the chin as he passed her loge. Here he comes — Hurrah, he's won!"

And Denis burst into the room with a shout.

"I've got him!" he cried almost before he was through the door. "I've got him! He's right here in the Quarter as I thought! Oh, such a tale as I've got to tell! Why—why Colette, Colette! *You*, child? What in the world are you doing here?"

But the girl ran to him calling him by name. "St. Denis, St. Denis!" in her French fashion, over and over again, and caught him about the shoulders,

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clinging to him, turning her white face up to his, laughing and sobbing together.

"Why, what is it, child? What is it?" said Denis, slipping an arm about her, and looking down into her eyes with a puzzled frown.

"Listen, St. Denis!" cried the girl, holding him still by the shoulders, and straining her face up toward his, eagerly, "listen! I've found the man you seek! the man who stole the—the lady from you! I know where he lives. I've been there. It's in the impasse du Maine. Ah, St. Denis, I've found him!"

"Why, bless you, Mignonne, so have I!" cried Denis with a laugh. "I've just come from there. Ah, we'll have a settlement a bit later, my German and I—but come, child, you're weak, you're trembling! pauvre petite, you're fagged out! Come over to the divan, here, and tell me all about it, all you know and how you came to know it."

He led the girl over to the divan and sat there with her, holding her hands in one of his, and patting her shoulder gently, for she seemed very, very tired, quite worn out, and sobbed hysterically.

"Poor little tired out girl!" he cried very low. "Poor little girl! Colette, you have n't been well, your cheeks are thin, Mignonne, your eyes are hollow. You must rest, take a month à la campagne. We'll see about it, hein?"

But the girl drew a little away from him, shaking her head.

"Ah, never mind me," she said. "Listen, St. Denis, I must tell you about the man and—and about Madame. It was Fifi Dumond who told me that you were looking for the Allemand with the yellow hair and the eye-glass and the queer left eyelid—and about the vieux cocher with the mourning band on his arm. I found the cocher, quite by accident, away over beyond the Arc near the marché des Ternes. I'd been over there to see a—a friend, and I came upon the cocher sitting asleep on his fiacre by the curb. He was alone, not in a cab rank ——"

"One for you, Teddy!" said Denis, looking up with a smile.

"——I wakened him," continued the girl, "and asked him about the Allemand with a monocle who had driven to the rue Denfert Rochereau and taken a lady away. I told him that the Allemand was a friend whom I wanted to find and whose address I did n't know. He was suspicious, the cocher, and would n't tell me anything about it, though I begged and teased and offered him all the money I had—but I—I found a—way ——"

"Colette, Colette!" cried Denis suddenly and turned the girl's averted face with his hands till he could see her eyes. "What do you—mean—child?" "What do you mean?" His voice was sharp with pain and horror.

But she hid her face from him and would not look up.

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"What does it matter?" she murmured, "to—such as—I am? Ah, I was doing it for you, St. Denis. I'd have spared nothing, nothing! No, wait, listen! So the cocher took me finally to the impasse du Maine where he'd taken the Allemand and Madame. Number 18 it is, 18 bis, at the inner end of the impasse. I knew the concierge, old Mme. Lambert, and talked with her, asked her what painters were in the house now, for I'd posed there a long time before. And Mme. Lambert told me there were four étrangers lately come to take the suite, au premier, at the right of the courtyard. She thought they were Prussian pigs, and that the sister of one of them was there also, une grande dame, tres belle. She said that the pig with the eye-glass had asked her to look up a maid for Madame, and that she had sent word to Diane St. Pierre, but that if I wanted the place she would recommend me to Monsieur for half my first week's wages ——"

"Good, good!" cried Denis. "Did you take it, child? did you take it?"

The girl nodded wearily.

"Yes, St. Denis. Yes, I took the place. I've been there caring for Madame for three days."

"But," said Denis, with puzzled brows, "but I don't understand—I do n't quite see! Why did n't you get word to us before, Colette?—three whole days!"

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The girl turned away from him and hid her face in her hands.

"I can't tell you, St. Denis," she said very low. "I can't tell you—ah, isn't it enough that I come to you, now? Isn't it enough that I'm giving her—giving her back to you, now?"

Denis sat for a long time staring at the bowed head and drooping shoulders.

He raised his face and motioned to me with his eyes. The Prince, von Altdorf and MacKenzie and I, rose quietly and went out of the studio into the sleeping-room beyond, and dropped the portière behind us.

Then, after a time, the girl turned once more and put up her hands upon Denis's breast.

"Do you—do you love her very, very dearly, St. Denis?" she asked in a whisper. The great eyes burnt into his.

"Better than my life, child," said he gently, "but she's not for me. She is another man's wife, and will go to him if we rescue her. She's a princess, Colette."

The girl's face dropped upon his breast and she shivered a little.

"Yet you'd bring her back, St. Denis? You'd bring her back for the other man? You'd risk your life to do it? You'd be so noble as that? Ah, St. Denis, I didn't know! I thought it was for yourself, and I—I could n't bear the thought of it. I was strong enough to go so far—to do what

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—what I did, but when I saw her, St. Denis, beautiful as the Mother of God, pure as an angel, glorious as—as nothing else I ever saw in the world, I could n't bear the thought of her coming to you—even though I'd lost you long since. St. Denis, she tried to send messages by me to—to M. le docteur Mac—Mac something, and to M. le Colonel von Altdorf but I wouldn't take them. I told her that I dared not—all because I was so madly jealous—St. Denis! St. Denis, will you ever forgive me?"

"Forgive you, child?" cried Denis, "forgive you, after what you—you did? after the sacrifice you made all for my sake? Ah, Colette, Colette, shall I ever forgive myself!" His voice choked and he bent over the dark head and raised the face and kissed it.

"I shall never forget, Mignonne," said he, "never till I die, for it was the most utter sacrifice I have ever known. No one ever did so much for a man. Oh, child, child, to have sold yourself for me!"

But the girl crept closer to him and lifted her face with a little sobbing laugh.

"Ah, don't feel so over it!" she begged. "It was nothing, just nothing! Why, see, I'm laughing, St. Denis. Shall not a girl love a man? And shall she not make any sacrifice for him, to gain him what he wishes? Think what you did for me—long ago! Think how you took me in from the street, ill, half starved, desperate! I'd no claim

upon you, St. Denis, but you pitied me—loved me a little I like to think—let me think so, St. Denis! Leave me my dreams! And I, how did I treat you? Ran away for a petty spite, shamed you, played you false—but it was all because I loved you—and because I was a woman. Hadn't I a debt to pay, *mon cœur*? Tell me I've paid it, St. Denis! Tell me you forgive me! I don't ask for love or tenderness, we're past that, but tell me that I've paid the debt and that you forgive me! Ah, now I must go. You've made me happy again as I thought never to be happy — You will rescue Madame, will you not, St. Denis? *La pauvre*, Madame! She sits like a queen in prison waiting, always waiting — No, they do her no harm. They are polite always. She has her own little room where I care for her, and she is well, but she cannot bear it long. Tell me what I can do to help you."

Denis crossed the room to a little cabinet upon the wall, and came back with a tiny pistol, an American revolver, chased and enamelled. It looked a mere toy, but such toys can be deadly playthings.

"Listen, Colette," said he. "Give this to Madame and tell her to hide it about her somewhere. Tell her that to-night we will come to her rescue, to-night at about two o'clock. Tell her to be dressed and waiting in her little room, waiting with the pistol in her hand, but that she must not fire it

save in direst need. She must use it in defense only. When we break in the doors, one of the four men who hold the Princess captive, will rush to her room and try, either to take her away while the others hold us back, or else to do her harm. She must keep him off with the pistol. He will not be difficult, I think, for he won't dare risk the sound of a shot. That is all. We will see to the rest. She must be ready for us. As for you, *chérie*, when you have given the pistol to Madame and perhaps prepared her for the night, you must go away at once. You cannot help us, and to stay would be dangerous for you. Make some excuse, a sister ill, an illness yourself, anything to get away. Now go with the pistol, Colette, go quickly. Paid your debt? Oh, child, child, you've paid the greatest price of all! I shall never forget."

At the sound of a closing door we came out of the sleeping room to find Denis upon the divan with his head in his hands. There were tears on his cheeks when he rose.

"Ah, gentlemen, gentlemen!" he cried, "yonder goes a woman who has given herself up to shame unspeakable to bring the man she loved to the woman whom she believed he loved. Is there any sacrifice greater than that? She has shamed me forever."

He went to the window and stared out into the gathering dusk, his hands clenched behind him.

Then after a time he turned to us again with a

little shake of the head and shoulders as if he would rid himself of the gloom that covered him.

"And now for my tale!" he cried and his eyes sparkled. "By my faith, it's worth telling! Look you, von Altdorf, while you went off down the Avenue de l'Opéra grinning from the top of your omnibus, your Austrian friend was on his feet beside his little table staring after you like a man hypnotised. He could n't seem to make out your game at all. He was fairly puzzled. I saw him shake his head once or twice and mutter to himself, then all at once he clinked a franc on the table and grabbing up his stick made off up the rue Auber on foot, I close after him, of course. Once he stopped at the curb, and made as if he'd signal a cab, but he shook his head and went on again. He halted over on the Place in front of the Printemps, and stood behind the little newspaper kiosk as if he could n't quite make up his mind what to do. Then, quite suddenly, he dashed out into the street and jumped upon the platform of a Gare Montparnasse omnibus that was passing. I followed in a cab, keeping close so that he should n't escape me—he rode inside.

"He went the whole distance to the Gare Montparnasse, and when the 'bus stopped, swung off and slipped up the little rue de l'Arrivée to the Avenue du Maine, I ambling along, still in my fiacre. He bolted into the impasse du Maine, like a coursed hare, while I stood on the opposite side of the

avenue staring into a charbonnier's window at a thrilling display of coals and kindling chips. I saw him go in the whole length of the impasse, and disappear under the arch at the inner end, number 18 bis, it is, and by the Saints, I could have howled aloud for sheer joy! Man, I know every inch of 18 bis impasse du Maine, I know it light or dark, drunk or sober—but chiefly drunk. A very good pal of mine used to live there, and many's the night I bunked on his divan when I—well, when trying to get home would have been—indiscreet—'in a manner o' speakin',' MacKenzie.

"I loafed about for five minutes and then went into the impasse to number 18 bis, and knocked at the concierge's loge. I trembled in my boots, by the same token, for it was six to half a dozen that the old lady would remember me. If she did I knew 't would come to a case of bribery and corruption, but thank God she's blind as a bat in daytime, and had never, to her knowledge, set eyes on me before.

"I called up an atrocious bad accent—'t would have brought the tears to your eyes with laughing—mixed in a great deal of English, waved my arms and talked very loud—to make her understand the better—in fact played the lately arrived nouveau as best I could, and demanded if she'd any vacant studios. I told her that my friend Cheltenham had said, in London, that he had lived there and liked the place. Cheltenham, the Honourable Dicky, was the pal who really had lived there. She nearly

wept at Cheltenham's name, the good old soul had worshipped Dicky. She said that his suite was occupied at the moment by some pigs of Prussians, four messieurs and one grande dame.—‘Aha,’ said I to myself, ‘is it, though? We’re growing warm!’—But if I would like to see the rooms she’d take me up. The Prussians, she thought, weren’t to be there long.

“So we went up after she’d whistled out Cheltenham’s old cat Giovanni, and showed him to me. Jove, that was an embarrassing minute, for Giovanni knew me at once, and treated me like brother.

“And now, before I go on, let me show you with a bit of paper just how the court and the rooms are arranged. You’ll have to know your way about, later. As I’ve said, the place is at the inner end of the impasse. The impasse runs right into it. There’s a square, stone-paved court that you enter through an archway. The loge of the concière is under this arch at the right. Now the house rises on all three sides of the court—the arch fills the fourth side. At the right, on the ground floor, there’s a sort of machine atelier, a shop of metal workers, closed, of course, at night. To reach the suite where Cheltenham used to live, and where the Princess is being held now, you go in back of this shop under another arch, a small one, and up one winding stair. But the rooms don’t open over the court, they open over a little unpaved alley on the other side. The space directly over the ma-

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chine shop is filled by an architect's studio, untenanted. On the little alley there's nothing but a row of shed-like sculptors' studios one story high. No one has ever occupied them since I can remember. Now the suite itself, consists of a fair-sized studio, square, with a big side light, and a very narrow little passage, running from it out to the door of the suite, upon which open a sleeping-room and a kitchen with a tiled cooking-stove built into the wall. But since I knew the place, another room has been added, beyond the studio. This room used to be another studio separated from the first by only a partition of boards, one thickness. You could hear perfectly anything that was said in the other room. It is in this last room, recently added to the suite, that the Princess is quartered.

"Now are you quite sure that you see how the place lies? You'll observe there's nothing next it or under it that is tenanted. It's quite isolated. No noise less than a pistol shot could reach any neighbouring ears, and that's a point for us, I would have you know. Mind you, once more, as you go in the outer door you've a long narrow passage before you, the kitchen and bedroom opening in turn at its left and the big studio right ahead. Then that's clear!

"Well, we went up, the old concierge and I, and pounded at the door. Some one inside gave a surly growl and a German curse, a most impolite curse, I protest, and finally opened the door an inch to see

what was wanted. He wasn't going to let us in at all. Very short about it, he was. But the concierge gave him a bit of her tongue, told him that I was an Anglais, a friend of her old tenant, who wanted to take the suite, and that she was coming in whether he liked it or not.

"So finally we got in, and I roamed about the place with my mouth open, doing a great deal more of my loud talking in mixed English and dreadful French, regular British tourist sort of thing, asking about the light and the ventilation and the price and such rot, and incidentally taking in all I could of the defensive preparations that the rogues had made.

"Our friend Steinbrücke was there, glowering in a corner and chewing at his nails like a villain in a play. Man, he was in an awful state of mind! though that's not surprising. There were two other men in sight, one of them the chap who had let us in, a German apparently, and the other I should fancy, a Novodnian.

"I caught sight of the small door in the wall that opens upon the new room and asked what that led into, but von Steinbrücke was on his feet in an instant, with his back against it, and said an invalid was inside. He tried to be off-hand and polite about it, but it strained him, poor chap. He'd had a bad afternoon.

"The concierge spoke up and told me that Monsieur's sister was inside and that we mustn't

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disturb her, that the room was merely another sleeping-room.

"Just then I heard a man's voice from behind the door in a husky sort of whisper and then—and then—*hers*, by heaven, answering him! It sounded a little weak, and very weary, but not ill, not ill, man, strong and calm as ever! Faith, I had to grip my hands to stand where I was and look uninterested!

"Then I set about to let her know I was there, stood near the partition wall talking in a loud voice to the *conciérge* and whistled as I walked about the room, a certain little air that—that the Princess would recognise, a song of Richard Lovelace's. She knew, then, she knew, for I heard a sudden little amazed glad cry that she smothered almost before it was out of her mouth.

"Steinbrücke gave me a suspicious look, but I stared in his face and asked him, still in bad French, how he liked the rooms and if he could recommend them to me.

"Then, after a time, I came away, but I said to the *conciérge* before we'd left the room that I'd be back again—loudly so that the Princess could hear.

"'Je reviendrai, Madame,' said I. 'Je reviendrai,' and I think *she* understood.

"That's all! I came straight away here to tell you. To-night we must make our dash. I've sent a pistol to the Princess by Colette, so that she'll know we are coming, and will be able to defend

herself if they block us in the passage and try to do any harm to her."

Colonel von Altdorf sprang from his chair where he had been excitedly nodding his head and tugging at his grizzled moustache. He seized Denis's two hands and shook them up and down.

"Lad, lad!" he cried, "why have n't we played together before? Why must I have grown grey before I met you? By my faith in God, you're the coolest hand I've ever seen and the cleverest head. We'll get her back now—thanks to you—— Oh, lad, I'm proud to know you!" And old MacKenzie beamed over von Altdorf's shoulder, and I seized Denis from behind with a great hug of delight, while the Prince of Novodnia cheered in a husky voice from the divan.

CHAPTER XIX

WE dined, all together, at a little restaurant near by, and then came back to the studio and spent the long evening in making our plans for what was to be done in the small hours of that night. We settled the slightest details of the attack, allowed for every possible contingency, and held a most spirited dress rehearsal in which Prince Karl enacted the part of the Princess Eleanor and I that of von Steinbrücke—somewhat to the detriment of my breath and personal appearance, for Denis made an uncomfortably pressing leader of the charge.

Then when we had done laughing over this, Denis and von Altdorf gave us an exhibition with the foils, just to get their hands in, as Denis put it, till von Altdorf, hopelessly outclassed, threw down his sword, declaring that Denis was the devil and no man at all, which was more or less true when Denis had a yard of steel in his hand.

And Denis, intent still upon "getting his hand in" strung an apple to the overhead lamp and cut thin slices from it with a German schläger filched from its decorative position on the wall, shaved it with a blade so swift as to seem a wheel of light till

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nothing but the core was left, and von Altdorf who rather fancied himself at the sabres, sighed and shook his head in despair.

Thus we whiled away the dragging time, and strove to cover with laughter and games the tense keenness of anxiety that was in all our hearts, the grimness of resolution and the sense of deadly peril that was nerving us to our task.

Old MacKenzie clicked his watch and gave a smothered growl of impatience.

"A quarter to twelve," said he. "God in heaven, must we wait forever? Who's for a hand at piquet? We've nearly two hours yet."

The Prince, Denis and I sprang up readily enough, for idle waiting at such times strains the nerves as nothing else, but von Altdorf stood in the middle of the room with his hands in his pockets and a somewhat guilty expression of countenance.

"Why I was thinking," said he, in a careless tone, "of—of just stepping over to the house to—er see that they're all ready for our return. I shall be back directly of course."

There was a subdued chuckle from MacKenzie which, I take shame in remembering, I echoed. Colonel von Altdorf went red as fire.

"Oh, they're quite ready, man," said MacKenzie, brutally. "I've seen to all that."

"Still, you know," insisted von Altdorf, "they may have forgotten something. It's best to be sure. I really think I'd better go." And Denis

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hacked at our shins under the table, and said, "I wish you would go, old chap. One of us ought to. Go by the garden, it's shorter."

Von Altdorf made for the little rear window.

"I sha'n't be long," said he as he let himself out.

He went up through the cool scented gloom of the garden, up under the acacias and through the old refectory porch into the house.

There was a dim light in the music-room and some one was playing very softly, with pauses of silence, upon the piano. Then, presently, the music ceased and there came to his ears the sound of low weeping.

"Mademoiselle!" said Colonel von Altdorf from the doorway. But the girl sitting before the piano did not raise her head from her arms. He went diffidently into the room with his heart playing strange tricks, thumping most curiously. Women in smiles, ready with quick speech and feminine ways, were a sad puzzle to von Altdorf. They lay beyond his world, undiscovered lands. But a woman in tears lay further still, beyond wider seas, filled him with an odd inarticulate distress, a longing to help and comfort, to caress and defend, a new longing. Aye, but filled him with a certain terror too.

He stood over the bowed figure and touched her shoulder awkwardly, timidly.

"Do n't, Mademoiselle!" said he. "Do n't, I—I beg. You—unman me! Do n't weep, Mademoiselle.

We'll bring the Princess back to you. You need have no fear—we'll bring her back."

"I do not—weep for the Princess," said Miss Jessica Mannering between her sobs.

"Why, then, Mademoiselle?" asked Colonel von Altdorf very low.

"I weep," said she between her fingers, "for a—for brave gentlemen who—go into peril of their lives."

"Your tears," said he unsteadily, "your tears should nerve their hearts and strengthen their arms. I'll—I'll tell them," added von Altdorf, felicitously.

The girl sprang suddenly to her feet and blazed at him. Her aspect was really quite intimidating, despite an occasional sniff and a furtive dab with a very moist handkerchief. Colonel von Altdorf shrank back a step.

"You tell them if you—if you dare!" she cried. "I'll never speak to you again! Never!"

Colonel von Altdorf sighed and shook his head.

"Alas, Mademoiselle," said he, "I fear I know little of women. They do such surprising things!" he complained. "They're so unexpected! I—I thought you would not mind my telling the others that you wept for them. Your tears, Mademoiselle, are pearls that each of us would wear into danger for a talisman."

The girl looked into Colonel von Altdorf's eyes.

"You say the truth, sir," she cried softly, "when you tell me that you know little of women —"

Ah, so very, very little!—but I would not have you know more, not now. I like your knowing little of them. You are more the man for it. Oh, I did not weep for the danger of the other gentlemen, gallant though they be! No—no!” when he would have moved toward her with a little cry, “no, we must not stand here talking of—of ourselves—of happiness and—and such, while the Princess Eleanor is in the hands of villains. That were to be selfish and more than heartless. You must rescue her first, and then ——” She caught her breath with a little sob.

“Oh!” cried Miss Mannering, “it fills me with trembling, Colonel, my Colonel, to let you risk your life as—as you must do.”

She came to him and put her hands upon his arm looking up into his face.

“You’ll be careful?” she begged. “You’ll be no more rash than you need? You’ll come back to me unhurt, safe? Ah, but I must n’t speak to you so! I would n’t make your eye falter or your arm weaken. I must n’t speak to you so, my soldier.”

She would have moved away from him, but Colonel von Altdorf took the small hands that had been upon his arm—making it tremble foolishly—and raised them to his lips.

“Your soldier, Mademoiselle?” said he in a strange voice, “*your* soldier? Oh, yes, yes I’ll come back to you! Do you think anything can

harm me now ? *Your* soldier, Mademoiselle ? Ah, *your* soldier ? ”

She turned away from him at last and sat down before the piano. She was weeping again softly but not tears of grief.

“ I must go, Mademoiselle,” said Colonel von Altdorf. “ The time is near for starting. Will you, before I go, sing to me again ? Will you sing your old song ‘ Love in my bosom like a bee —— ’ ? One likes to go into action with music.”

She touched the keys, faltering a little, and presently sang, her voice very low and none too steady. And Colonel von Altdorf stood beside her with bowed head.

Then when she had finished he took a long, deep breath and pulled himself together with a jerk. He was the soldier again.

“ And so, good-night, Mademoiselle,” said he smiling. “ The Princess shall be with you in an hour, or at the most, two, and I—I shall see you again, to-morrow. Good-night ! ” And he turned quickly and left her as if he dared stay no longer. Whereupon Miss Mannering, being one of those strange creatures, women, of whom von Altdorf confessed to knowing little, fell to weeping again and then to smiling, and held her two hands to her cheek as if they were suddenly grown dear to her, and again wept.

But Colonel von Altdorf went down through the garden and climbing in by the little window pre-

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sented himself once more in the studio with a carriage so jaunty and a face so illumined that old MacKenzie chuckled again. But Denis caught his breath sharply and went over to the opposite side of the room where he stood some time with his back to us, making a choice of the swords that hung there.

I think it was not till this moment, not till he saw von Altdorf's transformed face, that he realised what the night's work meant to himself, that rescuing the Princess but brought her back to another man, that she was lost to him utterly and forever, that once she was safe again, he might not have even the satisfaction of working and fighting for her. I think that the past week of desperate planning and working had quite driven his own plight from his mind, had directed his whole energy to the one fierce struggle to rescue the woman he loved, and that it was not till now the thought came to him, "what of to-morrow?"

Still, if the thought came to him in that moment with crushing force, he threw it from him with a force as great. The work was yet to be done. He turned about once more quickly.

"Make ready, gentlemen," said he. "You have your pistols, but remember they're for look only, no firing. It's steel to-night. We must have no more noise than is necessary. Take a sword, each of you, a light one. Here's my toy!"

He held up a thin glistening blade, a wonderful

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masterpiece from Spain. One might bend it till point touched hilt; slender as a foil and no heavier, weighted indeed like a foil at the hilt, properly to balance its length.

"We can carry the things under our coats," said he. "Thank heaven it's a rainy night! If I were you I should take sharpened foils, rather than anything heavier. They'll meet us with sabres, I think, for they'd a lot of sabres about the room to-day. They won't dare shoot. You see the beauty of the foils is that a man with a foil has a tremendous advantage over a sabre. He's infinitely quicker. Yes, take foils by all means. Have you the dark lantern, von Altdorf? Ready, Ted? Into your rain coats and come along then!"

But three of us were to go, von Altdorf, Denis and I. The Prince, though he at first insisted and afterward begged piteously, we would not take, for his life must not be risked. Sir Gavin was no swordsman and was moreover beyond the age for fighting.

In any event we considered that we three should be a match, in a surprise, for the four we were to attack. And the quarters, it must be remembered, were cramped.

We wrung the Prince's and old MacKenzie's hands. A sudden gravity came upon us all at the last, for we knew that we might not meet again. Then the three of us went quickly out into the wet night.

We turned, presently, from the Boulevard Raspail into the Boulevard Edgar Quinet, and walked down its length under the dripping trees, down past the high wall of the cemetery and so under the railway bridge to the Avenue du Maine, and halted before the mouth of the impasse. It lay black and wet and wholly deserted. Indeed there was no living thing in sight anywhere save that across the street and down a little way at the foot of the avenue stood a cab rank. The lamps threw a row of dispiriting yellow gleams across the shining pavement.

"I suppose," said Denis, "we'd best bring a carriage to the head of the impasse here, and have it wait. It would n't do to take it clear in?"

"I say take it right away to the door," said I. "It will sound as if we were ordinary lodgers coming home for the night. Have the thing turn about ready to make a dash the moment we're out with the Princess. If we're pursued we stand a better chance of getting well away."

"Right, O!" cried Denis. "Ted, you've at times a surprising head! Come along then, we'll all get into the carriage and ride up to the door."

So we went down the street to the miserable looking line of vehicles and roused a cocher who was sleeping peacefully inside his galérie.

"A l'impasse du Maine!" we cried, "tout au fond, and wait there till we come out!"

I don't mind confessing, now when it is all over and long past, that my heart jumped a bit and my

breathing quickened as we went rattling noisily into that long narrow echoing cul de sac, pistols in our pockets, swords hidden under our long rain coats, and a dark lantern bulging from the vicinity of Colonel von Altdorf's manly bosom. It seemed, there in the chill dripping rain, such an absurd thing to be doing in peaceful Paris at this end of the nineteenth century! I could not rid myself of the notion that it was all a huge joke, a masquerade over which we would have a great laugh presently. The planning of a desperate coup, seated at ease amongst lights and warmth and comfort, with friends about one, keen minds to offer suggestions, cool heads to weigh risks, is such a different thing to carrying out that coup, silently, grimly, in the dead of a cheerless night, with death grinning at one's face through the rain.

The cab halted at the extreme end of the impasse and we got out, gave our low voiced direction to the cocher—to turn about and wait—and rang the bell.

Now the law in Paris is so constructed that every house, rich or poor, whether in the Champs Élysées or the slums of St. Antoine, shall be under the charge of a concierge who shall close the same tightly at night, and admit the residents thereof only upon the ringing of a bell. Furthermore, each lodger upon coming in, must, if the hour be early, be recognised by the concierge, or if it be late and the concierge in her bed, so that at the

summons she releases the lock of the door with the "cordon" that hangs to her hand, the lodger must call out his name as he enters and closes the door. The *conciérge* system, it will be understood, is nothing more than a great arm of the police, an *espionage*, hour by hour and day by day, of every resident in Paris.

We rang twice before the *conciérge* waked and pulled her cordon. Then the lock clicked and the little door set in the great heavy gate that by night closed the archway, swung open.

"Steinbrücke, Madame!" sang out Denis in a bass guttural as we closed the door, "'soir, Madame!" and we tiptoed softly over the rough stones of the courtyard and under the little arch that leads to the stair at the right.

"Off with your coats now!" whispered Denis. "Swords ready? pistols?—lantern lighted, von Altdorf? Here, wait an instant!"

Now the little arch, under which we stood, gave not only upon the stair, but beyond upon the tiny alley alongside the old sculptor's sheds and under the windows of Steinbrücke's studio. It was a blind alley, closed by walls at both ends. Denis stole out into it and peered upward.

"Dim lights in all the rooms," said he when he returned, "all but the kitchen. They're taking no risks. Now then, up the stairs!"

We left our rain coats in a heap under the arch and mounted slowly, with infinite caution. But

near the top when there was but a step or two to gain, von Altdorf stumbled in the dark, and the closed lantern clashed against the stair rail.

We were at the door in an instant, but there came from inside a quick movement, the sound of hurrying steps, and a voice, as that of one on watch waking others.

"Now, then!" whispered Denis, "the door! Are you ready? One, two,—go!" He had placed himself, as we had arranged, a couple of paces from the door, back toward it, von Altdorf, sword hanging from wrist, had braced his hands against Denis's shoulders, I mine against von Altdorf's waist, and with a little run we shot through the flimsy door as though it had been cardboard.

Denis whirled as he fell forward, so that he went upon one knee, sword ready in his right hand, and the glare from von Altdorf's lantern streamed over his head and along the narrow little passage till it met the white faces and staring eyes of the pair of ruffians who bore down, half dressed but wide awake, to check us.

They had sabres, as Denis had predicted, and the blade of the foremost flashed over his head as he charged. But when it fell it rattled harmlessly upon the floor and its owner lurched face downward after it. Denis's thrust had been too quick for eye to follow.

Then the second man did a curious thing. Blocked so that he could not strike, by the fellow

in front of him, and now borne back by Denis's lightening point, he made no attempt at sword-play, but dropped his sabre suddenly, and threw himself forward, headlong, seeking to catch Denis's legs about the ankles and so bring him to the ground.

A man less quick would instantly have been floored, but Denis hurdled him as a football player will sometimes hurdle the opposing line or the man who tackles too low, and was at the studio door in an instant.

"After me, one of you!" he called over his shoulder. I pushed by von Altdorf who had his point against the fallen man's neck, and we burst into the wide space of the studio together.

The room was dimly lighted from small lamps hung upon the wall and from a large one overhead, which was turned low. There was a litter of clothes and blankets and pillows about the floor, and the air was full of tobacco smoke.

Baron von Steinbrücke stood in the middle of the room alone. He must have been sleeping, for he was clad only in drawers and undershirt. He stood with his back toward the door of the further room—the door was slightly ajar—and he held in his hand no sabre like the others, but a long slender blade such as our own. He stood leaning forward a little, poised, waiting. There was a slight smile upon his lips but this passed in an instant, and I shall never forget his look when he saw our two faces full in the lamps' light, and recognised us,

Denis who had stalked about the room under his very nose that afternoon asking questions in bad French ; and myself to whom he had, in his cups, babbled secrets that would hound him to his grave did I but make them known.

His sword point shook and drooped for a breath, then he was at us with a snarl of rage. I have never seen a more furious or more reckless whirlwind of attack.

"Give him to me, lad ! Give him to me !" said Denis, and I stood back while they engaged. I knew there could be but one outcome to that combat.

But their blades had no more than clashed when there came the sound of a scuffle from the room beyond. Alas, we had forgotten the fourth man ! And then the Princess Eleanor's voice.

"Quick, Denis !" she cried, "be quick !" There was no fear in the tone, no trembling, but it told a desperate need.

"Quick ! be quick !" she called again. "He's trying to — Shall I shoot ? Shall I shoot ?"

Denis whirled swiftly toward the door. I saw him lunge again and again quick as light, but the Austrian's desperate fury made a defence that even his matchless skill could not break down at once. The man would have to be tired out by rapid attack but there was no time for that.

Denis's back was at the door now.

"Now, then, Ted !" he cried, "take him on

now!" and my point reached Steinbrücke's left arm just as Denis went through into the inner room.

What happened there of course I could not see. It was told me afterward. Denis, it seems, was but in the nick of time, for the fourth ruffian, holding a great pillow in his left hand as a shield, was sorely pressing the Princess Eleanor with his sword while she had him covered with her pistol. Why he hesitated to finish his work I do not know. I suppose he was in deadly fear of the pistol and equally in fear of his master who had commanded him to kill the Princess, so that he hung between the two terrors hoping that our attack might be repulsed.

It is possible, on the other hand, that he was not to kill her till Steinbrücke seeing the battle hopelessly against him, should call the word. I cannot tell. I know only that at Denis's entrance he whisked about to face him, and an instant later dropped to the floor with a clean thrust through his right shoulder.

Meanwhile I was as busy as any man may be, with the Austrian. Now I am no Denis Mallory, though I take some small pride in my swordsmanship, and I confess freely that had I been the first to engage Baron von Steinbrücke I should, without doubt, have been overcome, but Denis had taken the first fire and fury out of him. That wonderful storm of attack had tired him a little, so that by

now he was breathing a bit hard, and we were evenly matched. Then, too, I had wounded him slightly in the left arm before his attention was wholly diverted to me from Mallory. The pain of this may have affected him. Without doubt his anxiety as to what was going on in the further room lessened his keenness. So we fought evenly, doggedly, he with a bitter desperation, I determined that he should not leave my point till the Princess was safe.

I remember that I heard muffled cries and oaths behind me, from the passage, a little crash and the scuffle of feet. I remember wondering dully what von Altdorf could be doing out there, and wondering still more, when, from the corner of my eye, I saw him pressing one of the men whom I had supposed done for, before his point into the light of the big room, and there engaging him. But I had no time for anything but my own fight. Indeed at one moment it seemed to me that I myself was done for.

What had happened out in the passage was something like this.

The first rascal, whom Denis had spitted before he could bring down his heavy sabre, was not dead, but merely run through the shoulder. Indeed, to kill any of the men, was far from our intention. A dead man meant subsequently the police, and an investigation that might prove awkward for us. We wished merely to disable them so that we could make good our retreat with the Princess Eleanor.

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But the fellow, when he had lurched to the floor, lay there so silent and so still, that von Altdorf supposed him unconscious—as indeed he may have been for a moment or two—and so stood directly over his huddled body while pressing the point of his blade against the back of the unhurt rascal who had tried football playing with Denis.

But a dead cutthroat is the only safe one, as Colonel von Altdorf will heartily bear witness, for, even as he stood wondering if he had not best stab the rogue before him and have done with him, there came a sudden movement from beneath, and his feet were all at once jerked from under him, so that cumbered as he was, with sword in one hand and lantern in the other, he fell sprawling and cursing upon the prostrate rascal whose fate he had been meditating.

He told us afterward, disgustedly enough amidst our heartless roars of laughter, that for quite a minute the three of them panted and squirmed and struggled in a ludicrous heap there in the dark, narrow little passage. He had one small advantage, which I doubt not he pressed. The two others knew not, in the gloom, whether they were striking friend or foe and so were chary of their blows. Von Altdorf on the other hand—so he says—struck most heartily at anything that came to his hand. 7

Presently, however, the unhurt one of the two slipped away from under von Altdorf, and groping upon the floor found his sabre, with which he dealt

at random a frightful slash, and at once the arms that clung desperately to von Altdorf's ankles dropped limp and helpless, and he, springing up, drove the other before him into the light of the studio.

By this time, Baron von Steinbrücke's breath was coming very fast and hard, and his high white forehead shone wet in the cross light of the lamps. He was no longer young and he had not lived the sort of life that preserves a swordman's vigour and endurance. I myself was fresh and strong, just beginning, indeed, to warm to my work, and I knew that, saving accidents, I had him in my power. In a little while now he must be so fatigued that I could do with him as I liked.

Then Denis entered again from the further room. He held his sword en garde, not knowing what he might meet, but his left arm encircled the Princess Eleanor's waist, holding her a little behind him. She, poor lady, now that the danger was past, swayed upon her feet and trembled near the edge of collapse. The long night of waiting, pistol in hand, of listening for our attack, and then her moment of deadly peril from the fourth ruffian's sword, must all have been a frightful strain to her already overwrought nerves.

Baron von Steinbrücke, when he saw Denis with the Princess upon his arm, made a furious attempt to break away from me and attack him, but I pressed him back, quickening my play, and touched

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him again lightly near his first wound. That brought back his defence though it wrung from him a snarling curse that was a foolish waste of sadly needed breath.

"Off with you, Denis!" I cried. "Don't wait for us, take her to the carriage at once and drive like the devil! We'll follow on foot. We're both safe. Off with you!"

"Off with you, lad!" came from the further corner where von Altdorf slashed merrily away—for the pure fun of it, I'm certain. He could have done for his man long since—— "Off with you, we're all right. God's love, why do n't you go?"

So Denis, with a lingering, unwilling glance over his shoulder—I knew he hungered for more fighting—bore the Princess away, and left the two of us to our work.

Von Altdorf finished his almost at once. I heard his opponent's sabre crash to the floor and the man himself drop slowly, first to his knees, and then, gasping hard, go flat upon his face and lie still. Then von Altdorf went out into the passage to make sure of the wounded rascal who had pulled him down, but this man had fainted again and was harmless. So that Baron von Steinbrücke alone remained to be dealt with, and von Steinbrücke's strength was going fast.

Von Altdorf who stood near, watching, was just crying, "Oh finish it, lad! finish it! This is no *salle d'armes*!" when the Austrian, in lunging wildly,

caught his foot in one of the garments, with which, as I have said, the floor of the place was littered, so that his impetus carrying his body forward, threw him upon his knee and his left hand which he put out to save himself.

But my point, held ready to parry his thrust, had lain at his breast, inclined slightly upwards, so that, as he fell, it entered into his throat somewhere above the larynx, in the soft parts under the chin, and driving inward must have pierced his tongue and so met the bony roof of the mouth, where having only the force given it by his falling body, it halted.

I jerked quickly back and withdrew the blade, but Baron von Steinbrücke lurched forward upon his face, and rolling partly over lay still and inert.

"By the Saints," cried von Altdorf in a hoarse whisper, "you've done for him, lad! or he's done for himself! There's an end of von Steinbrücke. He's dead as a dog! Ah, well, it can't be helped. Now what's to do? We can't leave all these swine lying about untended. They'll all die."

"Bring one of 'em to his senses!" said I, "and let him care for the others. Who's the least hurt? Curse von Steinbrücke anyhow! The thing was no fault of mine. I meant to try him and then merely disable him a bit—— Ah, well, who's the least injured of them, I wonder?"

"Mine, I fancy," said von Altdorf; "I barely

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scratched the fool in his sword arm. Fright and fatigue did the rest. Fetch some water."

I brought a jug of water from the further room—the rogue whom Denis had pricked there, was sitting up, by the way, though very shaky and white about the chops—and we dashed it liberally in the fellow's face till he gasped and shivered and opened his eyes, little the worse for his hurt, but much the worse for his fright.

Then, seeing that he was well able to care for his wounded friends, we slipped quickly out of the place, down the stairs and through the little outer door which Denis had left ajar, and never paused till we were far up the Boulevard Edgar Quinet under the cheerless walls of the cemetery.

Denis, meanwhile, had made all possible speed down through the court and out to the carriage into which he half lifted the Princess, and told the cocher to drive to the Place du Lion de Belfort, for he would not risk driving straight home, in view of the possibility of further trouble. Then he sprang in himself and closed the door.

The galerie rocked and leaped and jolted over the uneven stone pavement, and the Princess who had fallen back half fainting into a corner, was thrown roughly about on her seat. Denis slid an arm about her waist and drew her close to him.

"Try, Madame," he said in her ear, "try to forget who I am. Try to think that I'm—Jessica or—or any one else but myself, for I must make you

comfortable. I must save your strength till we are safe at home."

He drew her close into his arms till her head dropped weakly back upon his shoulder. Her brow touched his cheek, her hair was against his eyes, and she so rested upon him, that bracing his body against the plunges of the carriage, he brought her to the end as if she had lain upon a pillow.

At the Place du Lion they left the voiture and waited, while it drove off rumbling down the Boulevard Raspail, before they turned into the rue Denfert Rochereau.

They had but a little way to go, but this little way Denis was forced almost to carry the Princess who hung upon the verge of faintness. And he confessed to me, long afterward, that he was as nearly fagged out as a man may be, when they stood at last before the door of the old convent and the door opened upon eager waiting faces, warmth and safety, MacKenzie towering anxiously over the heads of the servants, the Prince half mad with fear and the long waiting.

But Denis, holding the Princess upon her feet by main strength, raised a white face toward them, calling, "Jessica, Jessica!" and Miss Mannering pushed through the group with a cry of joy and held out her arms to him.

Then the Princess roused herself for an instant and turned from Denis to her cousin. She took a

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little faltering, uncertain step as if with the very last of her strength.

“Jess, Jess !” she cried weakly. “Oh, Jess, Jess ! I’m so tired ! so ——” and she fell forward with a sob into the outstretched arms and laid her head in the hollow of Miss Mannering’s neck and fainted quite away.

2

CHAPTER XX

“**Y**ES, it’s a pity you had to kill him,” said Denis as we sat the next day talking over the night’s work. “I mean it’s a pity the beast had to kill himself, for that seems to have been the way of it. It may stir up an awkward row with the police. A dead man’s a serious matter in these times. I suppose there’s no doubt that he was quite finished, eh?”

“Oh, the man was dead, right enough,” said I disgustedly. “Lord bless you, the blade went into his gullet a matter of four inches or so! I was just about to disable him neatly too. Hard luck I call it!”

“It’s the end of a blackleg and scoundrel,” broke in von Altdorf. “There’s a list of people in high places, lad, a list as long as your arm who’ll breathe a sigh of relief when they hear the news—if ever they do hear it.”

“Ah, well,” said Denis, “the man’s dead, and it’s poor business abusing him now. Death wipes things out, rather, doesn’t it? One feels a bit low railing at a dead man for sins that he can’t sin again. Still,” he added regretfully, “since the rascal had to die I’d like to have been the one to finish him. I should have felt a glow of conscious

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virtue so long as I lived. I should have felt that I'd done one good act—amongst a sad heap o' bad ones. Has any one heard of the Princess since morning? Sir Gavin said then she was doing famously."

"She's fit as can be," said I. "What she went through seems to have harmed her little. She'll keep to her bed for a day or two for prudence's sake, and then be about again."

Denis sighed and his eyes took on their old look of pain and hopelessness. He rose from his chair and went over to the window where he stood tapping absently upon the glass and staring out over the garden.

MacKenzie and the Prince came in together having walked around by way of the Boulevard from the house. The Prince handed a dispatch to Colonel von Altdorf.

"This just arrived," said he. "I suppose it's from Novodni, via Vienna." Then he went over to the window to join Denis and overwhelm that young man anew with repetitions of his never to be settled obligation to him. Indeed the Prince's gratitude to Denis as the leader in the rescue of the Princess Eleanor, was most affecting to see, and his demonstrative southern volubility was a source of painful embarrassment to the young Irishman.

"Aye, it's from Novodni," said von Altdorf, unfolding the sheets, "and a long one too. I must tell Czerowitz that we're all right again and that

he need n't—what? Here wait, wait!" His face went suddenly very pale and he bent closer over the sheets that he was translating from the cypher.

His manner drew us all to our feet in a circle about him, the Prince foremost. But when he had finished writing out in fair language the strange looking jumble of words upon the dispatch sheets he sat so long, staring wide eyed before him, that the Prince touched him upon the shoulder anxiously, impatiently.

"Well, Colonel?" he demanded, "well, what is it? What's the matter?"

Then Colonel von Altdorf sprang up and faced his master, the written sheets crushed in his outstretched hand.

"It's the tottering of your throne under you, sir!" he cried bitterly, and his voice shook though he strove to hold it firm. "It's what was bound to come, what I warned you would come. Sir, sir, if you had but stayed in Novodni! George has seized his chance, curse him, and Steinbrücke won after all, despite our work last night, for he held you here in Paris, as he knew he could, by stealing the Princess, till George should be strong enough to make his move.—Listen to this! It's from Czerowitz, telegraphed from Novodni to his man in Vienna, and thence to me here.

"Georgias reported moving toward Novodni. Makarin already taken, used as base of supplies. Great excitement in Novodni. Ministry resigned

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this morning. Premier alone faithful to Prince Karl. Populace divided in sentiment, but Pavelovitch element grows in numbers. Prince loudly denounced for prolonged absence. Life guards faithful but army uncertain. Rioting in streets. Marshal Sbolin shot at while driving from Palace.'

"There's the country that your father bequeathed you, sir, and this is what you have made it! Aye, you, sir! I've served you faithfully, Prince Karl, and I shall serve you till you or I die, but I'll tell you the truth, by Heaven. You have brought this upon Novodnia and you'll answer for it at God's throne. Had you stayed where your duty lay, Georgias would be hiding in the mountains now, not marching toward Novodni.—Great God, can nothing rouse you? nothing?" And von Altdorf's voice broke so that he was forced to pause. He was terribly excited, and his hands shook as he stretched them appealingly toward the Prince.

"Listen, sir!" he cried after a moment, "there's just a chance, a desperate chance that you may save your country if you leave at once for Novodni, and travel night and day till you are there. Your mere presence would be better than an army. I will telegraph at once that you're on your way, that the Prince is returning to punish presumptuous rebels and to save his land from war and loot. You must start to-night, sir. You can be there in three

days. Meanwhile the news that you are coming may hold the situation as it is."

The Prince was very pale. He seemed dazed, bewildered, as if he had never dreamed of this possibility, as if the calamity had fallen upon him from a clear sky.

"But—but, Colonel," he faltered, "but, Colonel, the—Princess. I must—why I must see her first. We haven't come as yet to any understanding! I must ——"

"Aye, the Princess!" cried Colonel von Altdorf bitterly. "Always the Princess and never the trust God has given you! Are you a prince, sir, or a lover of women? Tell me that! By my faith, I do not recognise your father in you! Duty, honour, faith, bravery! Those were his watchwords—God rest his noble soul!—He thought first of all of his country and his people. He thought last and least—if at all—of himself. Many a night, sir, I've seen him go from his chamber to the Palace chapel and kneel there the night long, praying for guidance in some difficult matter of state. Aye, I've waited and watched outside the chapel doors while he prayed, guarding him from harm. No mobs rioted in the streets, then, Prince Karl, no Russian boot-lickers marched upon Novodni with the connivance of the very ministry and half the populace. The ruler of Novodnia sat on his throne, he made no love quests to the other end of Europe!—Ah well, sir"—his voice was break-

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ing again—"Ah well, Novodnia's days of honour and independence are over. She'll be a Russian pasture soon, a stable-yard, for sale, very likely, to the highest bidder.—Sir, I beg leave to tender my resignation from your service. I have a small possession called my honour which I hold indifferent, dear." He turned away from us all, his white face drawn and working, and sat down once more at the table dropping his head into his arms.

But Prince Karl went over to him at once and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Nay, nay, Colonel," said he in a low, gentle voice. "I won't accept your resignation." There was a certain pathetic dignity about the man, a certain humility which he wore with a sad pride.

"I will go to Novodni at once, old friend," he went on, stroking and patting the bowed shoulder as a woman might have done. "I will go to-night and make all possible speed. And when I am there—why we'll punish presumptuous rebels, as you say, Colonel, and we'll save our land from war and loot, for I think it may still be done.—I am not the man my father was—would God I were!—and you've spoken no more than the truth. I've been a poor ruler, Colonel, a weak prince—I was never born to rule—but what I can do, I will do. I shall save Novodnia or die fighting for her—more than that no man can promise. Come, old friend, your hand! Let there be no talk of resignations till Georgias is dead or back in his hills with a price

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upon his head, and the white bear has turned North once more.—And no man shall say of me again that Novodnia and her honour come second in my thoughts.”

He turned to where old MacKenzie sat smoking and brooding in the corner.

“Will it be possible, Sir Gavin,” he asked, “for me to see the Princess Eleanor for ten minutes before I leave this evening?”

“But sir, sir! she’s in her bed!” cried MacKenzie. “I’ve forbidden her to leave it before the week’s end!”

“Still,” insisted the Prince, “in a case of emergency like this, sir?—It would do no actual harm? No? Then will you be so good as to request the Princess to grant me a short interview this afternoon? Come, it is nearly four o’clock, and there is much to do before leaving. We will go to the house now, through the garden.—I shall return in half an hour, gentlemen.”

He moved toward the little window that gave upon the garden and old MacKenzie followed, shaking his head in unwillingness, but Denis Mallory stopped them.

“Just a—moment, sir,” he begged. “May I speak to you?”

The Prince turned to him with a smile and laid his two hands upon Mallory’s shoulders.

“Ah, good friend!” said he, “it cuts me deep to leave you here and to feel that I sha’n’t see you

again. You have given me so much, and I—why I've given you nothing at all, save work and pain. It cuts me deep to leave you!"

"Why, sir," cried Denis, with a little embarrassed laugh, "why, sir, you've hit upon the very point: I do n't want to be left."

"Yet I must go," said the Prince. "You would not have me stay?"

"No, ah no, of course not," cried Denis. "You must go, sir, there's no doubt of that, but—I hardly know how to put it—you've been talking about how much you owe me, and—and all that rot, you know.—Pay me out, sir. Take me with you to Novodnia! Let me fight for you, down there."

I think every one of us held his breath for sheer astonishment. I know I cried out, "Denis, Denis! You're mad! What are you thinking of?" But he would not turn his head.

"Take you with me, Mr. Mallory?" said the Prince in amazement, "take you with me? But—but your life here—your friends—your ties? Why our quarrel, *là bas*, is no quarrel of yours! Do you mean that you wish actually to take service in the Novodnian army? Are you quite serious?"

"Quite, sir!" declared Denis smiling into the other's puzzled eyes. His own eyes softened for a moment. "Why—why yes, sir, I've some friends to think of, have I not? Aye, three as good pals as ever a man boasted—— And there's a miracle, for friends have n't just flocked about me of late years,

They 've been scarce, damned scarce!—Still, my friends would n't say me nay to going with you. Would you, Teddy lad? Would you, von Altdorf? Would you, MacKenzie? No, they 'd say I could n't do better—— Fighting's my trade, sir. I was bred to it and I've done little else—and that little badly. I've served under five flags and I'd like to serve under the Novodnian banner for the sixth. They 'd tell you good of me, sir, should you ask where I might mention. They might speak ill of my living, but they 'd tell you good tales of my fighting. Faith, I commanded an army, in the field once! To be sure," he added with that whimsical touch that never left him in a serious moment, "to be sure it was n't just a first-class army, and I blush to admit that it was roundly defeated, but it was an experience for all that. Nay, sir, let me go with you, serve you, fight for you, help to seat you firm again on your throne. I've nothing to hold me here. Let me be about a useful business. I've served you and—and the—Princess here, let me serve you and—the Princess in the field."

"You go into the keenest danger, Mr. Mallory," warned the Prince, looking steadily upon him. "Our lives must be held cheap when once we've entered Novodnia."

Denis raised his sombre eyes and met those of Prince Karl.

"I have no love for my life, sir," he said quietly. And I think the Prince understood.

He reached for Denis's hand and took it between his own and wrung it warmly.

"Then you shall go!" he cried, "and I thank Heaven for it! I wish I had more gentlemen in my service in whom I could place such faith and to whom I could intrust such difficulties.—We leave at midnight, Mr. Mallory."

He was turning away when von Altdorf spoke.

"And I, sir? I go, of course?" He spoke a bit anxiously, for I think he feared lest the Prince might leave him to guard the Princess Eleanor.

The Prince laid a hand upon his arm, and gave a little laugh, a sad, little wistful laugh.

"Alas, my mentor!" said he. "Must we come to odds again? I go to my post of duty as you bid me—indeed, I needed not the bidding, once the need of me was made evident—but it was in my mind that you should stay. Ah, Colonel, I leave you to guard what is dearer to—what is next dearest to me after the welfare of my state and people. I leave the Princess in your care as I might leave her in the care of no other. Your trust is the highest of any—— Still, I do not command, Colonel, I do not insist. I beg. It is my dearest wish that you stay."

Colonel von Altdorf turned away with a little sigh.

"As you will, sir!" said he. "I had hoped for some fighting, but if I can serve you better here, I'll stay. So that you go yourself, and as speedily as possible, I have nothing more to ask."

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MacKenzie had meanwhile gone on ahead, so that when the Prince came up through the garden, and entered the house, a servant was waiting to say that if his Highness would be so good as to make himself comfortable in the music room, Madame would be down soon.

He had not long to wait till his wife appeared. She had clad herself in a loose house gown that hung about her in long, straight folds, and a little whim of woman's coquetry had led her to fasten at her bosom two or three pink roses fresh and fragrant and beautiful. She looked tired about the eyes, and she was paler than her wont, but she seemed not at all ill or weak. She gave the Prince her hand and sat down near him by a window.

"Sir Gavin has been telling me all about it—Karl," said she, "that the country is in the gravest danger, and that you must go there at once. I understand, quite. You mustn't be away from your post of duty, must you? Alas, you shouldn't have left it at all, Karl!"

The Prince threw out his hands with a little gesture of helplessness.

"There is something stronger than duty, Eleanor," said he. "No, I shouldn't have come away. It was wrong, selfish, criminal if you like, but—there's something stronger than duty. At least there has been something. Duty must be first, now."

"Ah, I know, I know!" cried the Princess, softly.

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"You came for me, Karl. I should n't be the one to reproach you, should I? And I've brought you nothing but trouble and grief and danger. I should think you'd hate me, Karl, dread hearing my very name. I think I must be something of a witch—are there witches now? there used to be when I was little—I seem to carry calamity with me. But I'm not quite like the witches, after all, for the heaviest of the calamity I suffer myself. It would have been a very good thing, I think, if I could have died when I was so terribly ill. Think what every one would have been saved."

"Oh, Eleanor, Eleanor!" cried Prince Karl, "you wring my heart! You must not talk so. You're tired still, my Queen, despondent. When you are quite strong and rested once more you will be glad to live for the very joy of living. You are too beautiful to be unhappy."

The Princess gave a weary little smile.

"Is beauty then a source of happiness?" she asked. "I had n't noticed — Ah, Karl, all this is beside the question! The question is, what's to become of us? What are we to do? I've been thinking of it deeply. I used to sit and think of it—to keep myself from going mad, I fancy—while I was in the hands of those—those men. And I came to the conclusion that if ever I was rescued, if ever I got safely away, I'd do as you wish me to. I shall come to you when you want me. No, wait! Hear me out! You mustn't misunderstand me,

You must n't think that I've come to—love you, you know, or anything like that. I think"—she turned her head and looked out through the window to the trees that swayed in the warm breeze—"I think that all the love has gone out of me forever. Perhaps I'm wrong. Perhaps it is only paralyzed for a time, but I think it's quite dead. I seem not to be able to feel that—that sort of thing for any one now—— Ah, it was a cruel, cruel trick they played upon me, was n't it? Well meant though it may have been.

"No, I don't love you, Karl, not in that way, but I've brought you so much trouble and grief that the least I can do is to give you the rest of my life, if you want it. I shall be a faithful wife to you and—if it shall seem best, later, to raise me to sit beside you, I shall try to be a good princess and a kind one. I shall try to make your—*our* people love me. Is that enough, Karl? Do you want me on such terms? It isn't the way a wife should come to her husband, is it, offering him the remainder of a crippled life for which she has no love; finding in herself none of the thing that makes life beautiful, to offer him? But such as I am, such as I can bring to you, you may take me when you will. It must n't be now, must it? We must wait till this danger is over, till the country is at peace again. It would n't be wise, of course, for me to come now. It would but give your enemies a fresh grievance. No, you must go alone, this

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time, but when you're ready, Karl, send for me, and I'll come. You have my promise."

The Prince of Novodnia dropped upon one knee and took his wife's hand in both his and kissed it. His own hands trembled a little under hers and his eyes were moist.

"You are the noblest woman in the world, Eleanor," said he, "as you are the most beautiful. You promise me a life so near to Heaven that I tremble to think of it. You do not love me now —— Nay, let us be honest, you never really loved me, even long ago before—before that dreadful veil fell. But I pray that you may come to love me in the future. It seems to me that no love so great as mine could fail, in time, to win a love in return. I shall be an abler general, Eleanor, a braver soldier, a better ruler for what you've promised me just now. Old von Altdorf shall have a better word to say for me before the next month is over."

He rose to his feet and stood before her, heels together, at attention.

"Have I your leave to go, Princess?" he asked. He was holding his lips in a thin, firm line, and he frowned a little in his effort to remain calm. It tore him sadly, poor gentleman, to leave her as he must, for what might be the last time. He knew well enough the peril that lay before him.

But the Princess Eleanor bent her head with a little, kind, tender smile and watched him while he marched stiffly out of the room, turning at the

door to bow again and go through it backward, bowing still, as one leaves the presence of royalty.

Then the Princess turned her head upon the high stuffed back of the chair, and laid her cheek against it with a little moan of utter hopeless dreariness.

Her cousin Jessica Mannering happening into the room an hour later, found her so, and dropped upon her knees beside the chair holding the Princess's hand against her cheek.

"He's gone, Eleanor?" she whispered. "The Prince has gone."

"Yes, oh yes, he's gone," said the Princess. "I have promised to follow him when he sends for me, when the troubles and fighting are over."

"Eleanor, Eleanor!" cried Miss Mannering, staring into her cousin's face. "You—you're going to him?—to the Prince? After—everything? Oh, Eleanor!—Why," she went on presently, in a shocked, amazed voice, "why, it's wicked—it's, it's—almost immoral! You don't love him. You can never love him after—what has—happened. Oh, say, you're not going, dear!"

"Why, yes," said the Princess, quietly, "I'm going. Love him? Oh, no! I shall never love any one again. You don't seem to understand. That part of me is quite dead. But I shall make him a good and faithful wife. I shall make him happy. What does my happiness matter?"

"And you'll go," said Miss Jessica Mannering, slowly. "You'll go to this simple, faithful gentle-

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man, as his wife, when you love another man—will love him as long as you live? Ah, surely, you're not the Eleanor I've known!"

"I don't love the other man!" cried the Princess, in a hoarse, shaking voice. "I don't love him! I tell you I hate him! I can't think of him without a shudder! Oh, Jess, Jess, help me not to think of him, dream mad, sweet dreams of him, see his face, night and day, before me! Don't talk of him, Jess darling! Help me to forget him! Help me to hate him as I must hate him, Jessica. I'm another man's wife; I'm the Prince's wife, and I'm going to him soon. Jess, help me to hate the man I—love, God forgive me! the man I must love till I—die! Oh, Jess, Jess, do you know what love is? It's the bitterest agony in all God's bitter world!"

CHAPTER XXI

WE took our last dinner together that evening at Voisin's in the rue St. Honoré. It was not a very cheerful meal, though I think we all did our best to make it so, forced a gayety that we were far from feeling, cracked our best little jokes with a sorry grin that deceived nobody.

We had one of the small up-stairs rooms to ourselves, and we sat long over the wine, for it was not till midnight that the two travellers must be gone, and there were hours to while away.

I remember that we fell to telling tales, as men sitting together will. Old MacKenzie called up strange happenings from his youth in the hospitals of London and Edinburgh, horrible things to freeze one's blood, such as come into the experience of an alienist. Von Altdorf had stories of marvellous dealings down in that hotbed of intrigue which we call the Balkans, bargains that were made by crowned heads, and compacts that were broken, villainies that were winked at by imperial eyes. And Denis who had been in more queer corners of the earth and had seen more of men and women, more of fighting and conspiracy than all of us put together, made our blood rise—aye and the hair

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stand up on our scalps too, with what had come to his eyes and ears. It was a memorable night. I shall never forget it. Nay, I've spent hours by the score thinking of it since, going over all that happened, seeing us all as we sat there together about the square table littered with glasses and bottles and ash trays and petits verres, rosy-red or white and innocent looking.

I can see old MacKenzie, huge and unwieldy at the end of the table, his great square head nodding through the smoke wreaths, his face a bit redder as the dinner went on, for he was a good trencherman, MacKenzie. I can see the Prince, pale and handsome,—now that he was sitting and the insignificance of his figure was hidden—his thick black hair, fallen a little over his forehead, fiercely moustached, smoking cigarettes by the score, till the burnt ends filled and overflowed the little tray before him. I see von Altdorf, strong and keen and sombre-eyed, his weather beaten face full of those lines that knowledge of good and evil, experience of the world's vicissitudes, storm and stress are wont to draw. And, more clearly than all, I see Denis. He is leaning forward with his elbows upon the table. A cigarette burns neglected in his fingers. He is telling us a tale of strange piracy about Peking and Tientsin, and that whimsical mouth of his is twisted in its inimitable way, a bit to one side with the telling. It smiles humorously, but the eyes above are dark and sombre—like Colo-

onel von Altdorf's—with too great knowledge of pain and bitterness, and the straight line between his brows seems never smoothed away. His hair—as I see it—is tumbled a bit awry over the forehead, as with a careless hand. His fine head is reared high over the broad shoulders, high and proud—but I see always the tragic eyes. Poor old Denis!

It was about half past eleven when we left the table—I think it cost us all a little pang—and drove to the Gare de l'Est. The luggage had been sent on ahead of us, and a compartment reserved. Then, once in the station and everything in readiness, we spent the last ten minutes in walking up and down the narrow quai beside the train, saying our last words. The Prince was with Colonel von Altdorf and Sir Gavin, giving them, no doubt, his parting requests and orders regarding the Princess Eleanor. I walked alone with Denis, his arm thrown over my shoulder.

“I don't like your going!” I cried bitterly. “I wish you could stay or I could go with you!”

“Ah, lad,” said he, “I wish it too, that I might stay or you go with me, but you must stay for you've ties to bind you, and I—why I must go. It's my only chance to—to serve Her further, Teddy, you know that, and I dare n't trust myself to stay. I can do some good work, là bas, before I'm snuffed out. Here I could do nothing—but drink myself to death probably. Ah, yes, I must go, Ted.”

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"But you'll come back, Denis?" said I eagerly.
"You'll come back of course!"

He turned me a bit, his arm about my shoulders, so that I looked into his eyes.

"Why no, dear lad," said he with a little smile, "no, I sha'n't come back. We won't meet again, Teddy." And my heart went down in me like lead for I knew that there was no winning him from his resolve.

"If I can help to set her firm upon the throne beside her husband," he went on, "if I can help to save Novodnia for him and for her, it will be a finish worth while, Ted, a finish not to be ashamed of, but it must be the finish, lad! There must be no mistake about that, no anti-climax."

He pulled me closer with his arm as we walked far up the narrow quai. "And meantime," said he, "meantime you'll—you'll look after her? You'll see that no harm comes to her? Oh, of course MacKenzie and von Altdorf are here for that. It's their business, but I—well I suppose I'm a silly old woman and——"

"I'll look after her, Denis," said I. "No harm shall come to her, you may be sure of that."

"Why!" cried Denis, giving me a little shake with the arm that lay over my shoulders, "why, that's a dear old chap! You see I can—well say things to you, Teddy, that I couldn't say to old Sir Gavin or even to von Altdorf, and—she's all there is to me. I think of nothing else."

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Then, for awhile, we walked in silence, Denis thinking, I know, of the woman he loved, and I, sick at heart over his leaving me. Steam from the engines hissed and wreathed about us. There was the smell of oil and smoke and machinery everywhere. Our two shadows, cast by the great arc lights overhead, sprawled and wavered and danced grotesquely before our feet. Porters with luggage for the van dodged past us, breathless and hurried, and passengers for the train rushed up and down the platform looking for vacant compartments.

"And there's nothing else, Denis?" I asked, "nothing else that I can do, no business to settle, no one to see?"

"No, lad, no," said he, "I've few ties, God knows — Wait, though! Colette! Oh Teddy, Teddy, it sends a stab through me whenever I think of what that girl did! I'll write to her, but do you go and look her up, once in a way, Ted. She's not well. Indeed I fear she's grievously ill, and she's poorly provided for. She—loved me once, poor child! She played me false, as they've all done, some time or other, but I think—I think she loved me through it all. Who's to gauge a woman's motives? And Heaven knows she made amends most terribly! Come, they're closing the doors. The train will be off directly."

We rejoined the others who stood at the door of the reserved compartment, and Denis wrung the hands of each of us.

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"It's likely that we sha'n't meet again," said he with his old sweet smile, "MacKenzie, and you, Colonel, and Teddy. Good old friends! Aye, the truest friends I've ever known! We've had a good time together, and none of us will ever quite forget it. Good-bye! Good-bye, all of you! You shall hear what we do, là bas.—What, Teddy, sour and glum? Ah, none o' that, dear lad! Give us a smile at parting! Good-bye!"

The guards ran along the train, slamming doors and crying their last "*En voiture m'sieurs et dames*," and directly the long train pulled slowly out of the Gare de l'Est.

I saw a waving hand, two of them, from the window behind which sat the Prince of Novodnia and Denis Mallory. The hands were lost in a steam-wreathed distance. I saw the rear lights of the train, and watched them till they too disappeared in the night beyond. Then I turned with a heavy, bitter heart and a drooping head, back to the waiting-rooms and the street, with von Altdorf and old MacKenzie.

Colonel von Altdorf turned his head for a last look into the lantern starred gloom which had swallowed up the train. "Yonder goes a man!" said he, "aye and a brave gentleman!" And old MacKenzie plodding heavily beside him croaked an inarticulate assent. But I answered nothing. I was too sore at heart for I knew that I should never again, on this side the grave at least, set eyes upon the man I loved above all men.

CHAPTER XXII

I WOULD be as brief as possible in speaking of the days that followed the departure of the Prince of Novodnia and Denis Mallory, for it was a time of inaction, and must be of small interest. We had, in due time, a dispatch from Vienna telling us that the travellers had safely reached that point in their journey, then later, one from Belgrade, and at last, to our great relief, from Novodni the capital of Novodnia, stating, in few words, that the end was reached, and in time, they hoped to check the advance of the Pavelovitch forces and to repair, to some extent at least, the harm wrought upon the country.

I find it difficult to write of these days, for, as I have said, it was a time of inaction, and the trifling events that filled our hours and absorbed our activities, seem, now that I go over them in preparation for setting them upon paper, of small moment, immaterial and irrelevant to the tale I have striven to tell.

Yet one thing I must set down. I had moved my belongings from my old quarters in the Boulevard Montparnasse to Denis's studio, partly for the simple satisfaction of living where he and I had been so much together, and to prevent the rooms falling

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into strange hands; partly that I might be nearer the old convent where I spent many hours with MacKenzie and von Altdorf and Miss Mannering, and, indeed, sometimes with the Princess, though she still kept much aloof from us all.

Well, as I say, I had taken the studio, and sat there one morning with Colonel von Altdorf talking over, as was our wont, that famous night's work in the rescue of the Princess, when von Altdorf cried out:

"But, by our Lady, man, I'd give something to know what became of those rascals afterward! whether the fellow we revived was able to care for the others, and what they did with Steinbrücke's body. There must have been an awkward situation with that clay on their hands."

"I'd jolly well like to go and find out!" said I, laughing a little, "if it were n't too much like putting one's head in the lion's mouth. Gad, I've never walked the streets since without turning cold every time a step came up behind me, for fear it might be an 'agent,' on my track for murder. I know exactly how a criminal at large feels. It would be a lark to go there and ask a few questions, though!"

"Well," said the Colonel slowly, "why not? After all it would be safe enough. The concierge does n't know you from Adam, and even if one of those ruffians should be about, which is n't probable, he would n't dare say a word. They've as good reasons as we, or better, for not wanting the affair

to leak out. Why not go? You can be a harmless student looking for rooms, like Denis."

"By Jove!" I cried. "It sounds easy enough! I might reconnoitre a bit, anyhow. I'll do it, right away now, this morning, before I weaken. Where's my hat? Will you wait here? I shall be back in an hour."

I caught up my hat and stick and went quickly out, laughing still, at the sheer audacity of the thing. I took a cab as far as the Avenue du Maine but dismissed it at the impasse, and walked in, with—I must confess—some inward qualms now that I was on the very ground, for my quest might well turn out a very dangerous bit of folly.

The fat, grey-haired old concierge was sitting on a stool outside her loge, in the sunshine, cutting up vegetables for a soup, with a great earthen bowl in her lap. She gave me a smile of welcome, for she was a merry old soul, and I asked her if there were any vacant studios, suites for choice, in the building. The concierge raised a pair of expressive hands to heaven.

Studios? but yes, parbleu! More studios than she wished. This year, God knew, she had had pas de chance! There seemed to be no étudiants in Paris, and for result, voila three grands ateliers empty on her hands, to say nothing of the sculptors' sheds! Would Monsieur desire to look at one beautiful suite, but beautiful, voyez vous! and si com-mode! It had been, only two days since, vacated.

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"Ah!" said I, inwardly, "now we're getting to the matter!"

Why yes, possibly later, Monsieur would go up and have a look at the rooms, but he would be glad to know first what they were like.

Bien, they were a studio, carré, quite large, with sidelight, a sleeping room and petite cuisine. There was also another sleeping room beyond the studio, if one wished it, though it did not properly belong to the suite.

"That's it!" I cried again, inwardly. "That's the one! vacated, eh? So they've made off!"

But surely such a suite should not lack occupants! Was it possible that it must go begging?

The protesting hands again appealed to heaven.

What would you? As one had said before, there seemed to be no more students in Paris. Oh, to be sure, there had been occupants of the suite, but only for quinze jours, and, voyez vous—this with a lowered voice and confidentially nodding head—voyez vous, strange occupants, if one should ask, Allemands by their look, four messieurs and one woman, une grande dame, like a queen! One had said she was the sister of the Monsieur with the eye-glass, but—a shrug here, and a droop of the eyelid—that was as one liked to call it. Aye, strange company! What would Monsieur say, for example, of a quarrel among the four Allemands one night, over the lady, sans doute, a quarrel si feroce, that it left blood stains on the floor—— Yes, yes, to be sure,

they had tried to scrub them out, but one knew blood stains for all that!—si feroce that every one of the messieurs was in bandages the next morning, and one, mon dieu, one so near the point of death that he was carried down to a fiacre like a dead man, save for his cursings in some foreign tongue, and driven away to a hospital probably!

I think I nearly cried out at this. Von Steinbrücke wasn't dead after all, then!

Dangerous lodgers, indeed, one would say, I hastened to assure her with the proper amount of horror. And the house well rid of them. It would seem to be a case for the police. But the lady? Did she leave with the others?

Another inimitably French shrug.

Ah! Monsieur arrived at the point! What would Monsieur think of the lady's complete disappearance the night of the quarrel? but complete, voyez vous! She had never been seen since, nor the young woman who was her maid. Si, one saw strange things from time to time when one was a concierge, but none so strange as this. No more Allemands for 18 bis impasse du Maine! Mōn dieu! they might be anarchists. One might be blown out of one's bed some fine night! No, no more Allemands! Would Monsieur care to go up and look at the rooms?

I had found out all I wanted to know, but to oblige the old woman I went up to the bare and dismantled rooms and listened to much unnecessary

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information as to their desirability. It gave me, upon my word, something of a thrill, to stand again on the spot where I had fought my long battle with that villain Steinbrücke, to go through the little passage where we had made our first attack and where von Altdorf had so nearly come to grief, but I was glad, at last, to get away from the place—it smelled of tragedy—and out once more into the warm spring sunshine, leaving the old concierge smiling and delighted with a gold louis.

As I have said, we saw, in these days, little of the Princess Eleanor, for she kept much by herself, solitary and queenly, brooding over her grief and injury, her wrecked love, and, as she believed, her blighted life. She passed her time reading or idle in her own apartments, or walked through the great garden in a tragic isolation that no one dared brave.

I was glad to perceive, however, that as the days and weeks went by, she showed an increasing desire for the company of her cousin, Miss Mannerling, and that the coldness between them seemed in a fair way to disappear altogether. Toward Sir Gavin, von Altdorf and myself she was ever courteous and considerate but never familiar. She maintained always a certain barrier of formality, an evidence constantly in view that she found herself unable to forgive the injury we had done her.

And now that I may look back upon it all dispassionately, with the impartial clearness that time

gives to the eye, I cannot feel any of the resentment, any of the anger that filled me in those days at her seeming blindness to the fact that what we had done had been done for her own good, to save her life indeed, and greatly to our discomfort.

I can see now, as in those days I would not see, that a woman may hold the saving of her life cheaply beside the wrecking of that life's happiness in the cruelest fashion possible.

I can see how she must have suffered, what unspeakable agonies of shame and despair and hopelessness she must have endured at having the promise of a very heaven upon earth, a passion of love too great for words, held to her lips only to be dashed away when she was about to drink. Aye, I can see now, that few women have suffered so, and I wonder little at her resentment toward those who had brought grief and shame upon her.

Still, for some reason—indeed, I know not what—toward me, among the three of us, she seemed to cherish least ill will. It seemed to afford her a certain pleasure to talk with me when we met by chance in the garden, as sometimes occurred, for I walked there now and then in the cool shade.

I remember that it was at our first meeting in the garden she learned from me of Denis's departure with the Prince for Novodnia.

I had been walking up and down one of the gravel paths under the acacias, puffing at my pipe and wondering what was forward at the seat of

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war—we had that morning received the dispatch from Novodni telling us that the Prince and Denis were safely arrived—I was wondering what would be the first steps taken to check Georgias and his horde in their advance upon the capital, when I saw the Princess Eleanor coming down from the house with a book under her arm. I could not have retreated unseen, and so I waited, bowing, hat in hand, and apologised for my trespass upon the ground where I had no right to be.

But the Princess gave me a little faint smile and begged me to walk there whenever I might choose.

“Indeed,” said she seating herself in the long steamer chair that had been set for her, “indeed, I was a bit lonely, a bit at a loss for something to do, some one to talk with. Jessica is in the house with—with Colonel von Altdorf,” and she paused to smile amusedly, a bit wistfully. “Moreover,” she went on, “I have long wanted to ask about—those ruffians in the impasse du Maine. What has become of them? What happened after I—after we came away? You were fighting, I remember, with their leader—Herr von Steinbrücke, is it not?—and Colonel von Altdorf with another man. I trust you took no harm, no wound?”

“Why no, Madame,” said I with a little embarrassed laugh, “none at all—though I confess it was an accident brought me out of my own encounter.”

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"And the—men?" she demanded.

"Why," I cried, turning a bit red, "we don't know about them"—for this was before I had made my inquiries in the impasse—"we wounded them all, and—well as for Steinbrücke, we've reason to think he'll fight no more."

"He's—dead?" she cried in a half whisper.

"I'm afraid so, Madame," said I. "But he well deserved it, so don't waste your pity upon him. It was a better death than he merited."

She sat for a little time silent, her mind, I know, going over that night's work, over her long suspense, the attack, her peril from the fellow who would have killed her, and finally her rescue.

"And your—and Mr. Mallory?" she asked presently in a low voice that she strove to render casual, ordinary, "I hear nothing of him. I trust he has not left your company. I owe him thanks for my rescue." She kept her eyes down but I think her breath waited for my answer.

"Denis?" I cried amazed, "Denis? Why, Madame, you surely knew! They must have told you! —Denis has gone with the Prince! They reached Novodni last night. He's gone to help save the country!"

She looked up swiftly with a white face and parted lips. Her eyes were full of terror.

"He's—gone—down there?" she whispered. "He's gone with—the Prince? He's going—to fight for—Novodnia?"

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Then all at once she seemed to realise that she was showing her excitement too plainly, for she lowered her eyes and paused a moment to control her voice so that it was cold and fairly steady when she spoke again.

"Indeed I wonder that I—was not told," said she. "Not that it is of any consequence to me," she hastened to add, "but I should have liked to send my thanks, nay my real gratitude to this—gentleman for his service.—I wonder that he should choose to go with the Prince since the quarrel is none of his. I presume the mere love of fighting draws him."

"Madame!" I cried warmly, "the bravest gentleman in Europe was not drawn into a petty Balkan squabble for love of fighting! He went there because it was his only means of serving you further. I wonder that you who know him can do him such injustice! He has gone to Novodnia to lend all his skill and strength to seating Prince Karl firmly once more upon his throne, and you beside him, and doing this he means to lose his own life. He will not, if he can avoid it, come out of the war alive." And I told her how Denis had begged the Prince to let him go, and I told her what he had said to me on the platform at the station, how his last words had been to urge me to watch over her. Nay I went further, angered beyond restraint at her speech. I told her how he had laboured, and grown white and ill during that week of her imprisonment, and of

how he had planned the attack upon the impasse du Maine and borne the fiercest of the fighting. I went back further and told her what I knew of his struggles with temptation, with himself, when he had used to see her daily in the garden, how he had to fight a stern battle to play his part with honour, how easy it would have been for him to carry her off and defy us all, but how he would not do it. I told her how he had loathed the deceit he had to practice, how both von Altdorf and I had seen him fighting his battle alone after he had come from her. I told her something of how he had given up absinthe and what it had cost him, and of what I had found late one night when I came in from my chance interview with Steinbrücke, the night after Denis had seen her in the garden for the last time, and she had told him what she thought him. I told her how the Prince had forced a fight with Denis and how Denis had spared his life.

And so I went on, defending the man I loved, telling her how we all, old MacKenzie, Colonel von Altdorf, the Prince, all of us had come to think of him as the noblest, most unselfish gentleman we had ever known. And the Princess, eyes upon the ground, hands gripped tensely in her lap, listened with never a word of protest, nay with a sort of eagerness, I'll swear, a breathlessness that mutely prayed me go on when I paused for breath.

I was, at the moment, too angry to notice little signs, too hurt to observe significant things, but

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now, as I go over the scene in my mind, I can picture her, flushed, silent, listening, full of an eagerness that she would not manifest, hungry for words and praises of the man she loved, but ever forcing herself to the cold indifference in which her pride must cloak itself.

And when I had made an end of speaking, stammering for very want of words, flushed and unstrung, she only stirred in her chair with a little semblance of weariness, and raised her gloomy eyes for an instant to mine.

"Indeed, sir," she said coldly, "this gentleman seems to stand in no lack of friends to defend him. I have no wish to dispute you. I remember him only as one who wronged and shamed me cruelly—— May we not speak of something else?"

But I sprang to my feet red and angry.

"If he wronged you, Madame," I cried, "it was to save your life! If he seemed to do a dishonourable thing it was because he held your safety higher than his honour. And if all this is not enough, he saved your life a second time, and is giving his own at this very moment for your sake! I beg your leave to go, Madame!"

The Princess looked up swiftly and half stretched out her hand to me. Her eyes were wide and pleading and her lips quivered.

"Ah, no, no! Don't go, Mr. Creighton!" she begged very low. "I do n't mean to ——"

"I beg your leave to go, Princess!" said I again, for I was very angry.

"Why, very well, sir," said she faintly, and sank back once more in her chair. "I would not have you go, but if you must—why I won't stop you. Only—only remember that you are always—welcome here—in the garden—I shall always be—glad to see you." And I marched stiffly away, saying to myself that it would be a very long time before I should walk again in the old convent garden.

CHAPTER XXIII

WAITING—waiting—waiting. That seems to me, as I look back, to have been the burden of those days and weeks that dragged so interminably and left with us no record of action or accomplishment. Waiting for what? I know not, save for news from the south, and of news there was all too little. I had a letter from Denis—it is before me now—written a week or so after his arrival in Novodni. It told vaguely of plans afoot or perfected for the defence of the capital, for the division of the attacking army by drawing a part of its strength away toward the north to protect its own communications. It told of measures passed by the Prince to gain the favour and support of an uncertain populace; of the Prince's calm, brave bearing in the face of danger; and of his own delight at the prospect of again smelling powder and sleeping under a tent. And at the very end of the letter one little paragraph that bespoke the old Denis. "You'll guard Her well, dear lad? You'll let no harm reach Her? You'll write me of her now and then, how she looks, if she's well, if she seems happier? That's all that matters, you know, that she shall be well and happy."

I spoke of the letter to the Princess when I saw her next in the garden; for with the passing of my

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first anger I had given up my resolve not to meet her again, and so talked with her often, striving as best I might, to shift her thoughts from unpleasant things to ordinary matters, the cheerful matters of every day.

But when I told her of the letter's end, quoted his words as nearly as I could, the Princess bent her head very low and the hands in her lap trembled. Then presently she asked some little questions that started me talking again of him.

I think I was stupid enough, in those days, not to notice that when I was with her, our talk, however begun, managed always to fall upon Denis Mallory—my talk, that is, for the Princess said no word of him, only listened, face turned away. I suppose it was because my mind was so full of him that speaking my thoughts seemed but natural. I suppose that is why it never occurred to me that we talked of little else, that if we spoke of the other matters, some hint, some question of hers, indirectly put, brought him back.

I told her—indeed I must have told it many times over—of the first evening in the Café d'Alençon when we chose Denis to play the Prince's part before her. I told her of every incident that followed, from that time to the last dinner at Voisin's and the parting at the Gare de l'Est. I told her such adventures of his as I happened to know, adventures afield and afloat, wars in strange countries, filibustering and looting, and searching for aban-

doned mines. And the Princess Eleanor listened, face turned away, speaking no word.

So we waited, inactive, idle, hoping for tidings that would set our minds at rest and give us a definitely marked future for which to make arrangements; fearing things that we would not admit to each other, nay not even to ourselves.

Colonel von Altdorf had news from time to time, now a dispatch telling in cypher of some new movement, now a letter from some one high among Prince Karl's advisers, from the Prince himself, or, as in one instance, from Denis.

And ever, as information came to him, as the situation became clearer and the strength and mobility of the opposing forces was made plain, von Altdorf's brows drew lower and lower and the line of his mouth more stern. He said nothing to me, nor, I believe, to any one, but I knew that the gloomiest forebodings filled his heart, and that the welfare of Novodnia lay in desperate straits.

But just at this time something occurred that for a while took my mind from warfare and led it into a very different channel.

Returning to the rue Boissonade one morning from the other side of the river, I found a young lad waiting at the loge of the concierge, that canny old body having refused to trust him alone in the studio. The lad explained that he was from Mademoiselle Olivier who was very ill and wished to see me at once.

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"Mlle. Olivier?" said I. "Now, who the devil's Mlle. Olivier? I don't know any Mlle. Olivier! You've come to the wrong place, mon vieux."

But the lad insisted, "Mais si, Mlle. Olivier! Mlle. Colette Olivier!" She demanded to see me because I was the friend of Monsieur St. Denis! I must come at once.

"Ah!" I cried. "Mlle. Colette, eh? Why did n't you say so before? Come along!"

We took a fiacre, in which the lad sat beside me, stiffly upright, awed and silent at such splendour, and drove across the Boulevard Montparnasse and down the familiar old Boul' Miche' till we came to one of the narrow little side streets near the Musée de Cluny.

Here, there were interminable stairs to climb, dark stairs none too clean, past doors whence came an odour of cooking, a clatter of dishes, household squabbings. Then, at the very top of all, a door where the lad knocked softly and called through the keyhole,

"C'est moi! moi, avec, Monsieur!"

A young woman came out upon the landing—the ordinary type of Boul' Miche' young woman, though with a certain unfamiliar gentleness of bearing, a soft moisture in her eyes, an utter and strange lack of coquetry.

She closed the door after her, and from behind it came a sound of hoarse coughing, of little moans in a faint voice.

"C'est, Monsieur Creighton?" asked the young woman, "l'ami de St. Denis?"

"Why, yes," said I, "yes, I'm Creighton. And Mlle. Colette? She's ill, poor child? Can I do anything? St. Denis would have me care for her in any way possible, I know."

"Hélas, Monsieur!" said the young woman. "None of us may care for her long! She's very, very ill, but she *would* see you before—before it's too late, because you were the friend of St. Denis. She would give you messages for him. Will you come in, Monsieur?—But do not stay long—she is so weak! She must not be tired!"

I went into the room and the young woman closed the door softly after me, remaining outside.

It was a very small room, hot and close and stifling, from the tiny stove in the corner that filled it with fumes of coke. The window was closed tight.

The girl in the bed gave a little weak cry when she saw me, and held out her hand eagerly. The change in her, since I had seen her before, was shocking. She was terribly thin and white, and the two red spots in her cheeks gleamed like crimson paint. Her eyes, that seemed twice too large, burned feverishly in their hollows.

"You—came, Monsieur?" she whispered. "I—I thought you would come. It was so—so good of you! St. Denis wrote me that—you would come when I should—send for you."

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I dropped upon my knees beside the bed and caught the two wasted hands in mine.

"Ah, child, child!" I cried, "why did n't you send for me before? Why did you wait till—now? I'd have come so gladly, Colette, so gladly!"

She gave me a little tired smile and turned her head wearily upon the pillow. "Grand merci, Monsieur!" she whispered, "grand merci! But I did n't need anything—they've been good to me, Elise, and Marie Delmar, and all. But—I wanted to see—you to—ask you to say—say good-bye for me—to St. Denis ——"

"Ah no, no!" I cried. "Ah no, Colette! It has n't come to that! We're going to take care of you now, to take you away where you'll get better soon, where you'll get quite well—don't talk of good-byes, child!"

But she moved her head on the pillow and a little fit of coughing came and shook all her frail body cruelly, shook her till she gasped for breath.

"It's—too late, Monsieur!" she whispered after a time. "Listen—listen, Monsieur! I have very little—strength left, listen! Say to—St. Denis, dear St. Denis! as I cannot—say to him, myself, that I'm—I'm glad it—turns out—this way. Say to him—that I've loved him always, always, from—the very first, that when I—ran away, when I played him false—it was for a silly, silly pique—a woman's pique because I—I knew that he had—never—loved me, that he'd only been sorry for me,

kind to me, kinder than any one else in all the world. Oh, say to him that I—loved him madly through it all. Tell him, Monsieur, that what I—did, a little while ago, for him, was—reparation, to make up for—for wronging him; that I did it—gladly—ah so gladly! Tell him not to be—sorry, not to—regret. Tell him that when I—go—as I must soon go, it will be thinking of him, saying his name, holding his—locket to—my lips!” And she pulled from her bosom a little flat locket that was fastened about her neck by a thin gold chain.

Another fit of coughing shook her, and at its end she lay silent for a time, panting for breath, weak from the strain. The edge of a letter, dislodged by her movements, showed at the neck of her garment. I saw the writing and it was Denis’s hand.

“Tell me—Monsieur,” she whispered presently. “He’ll come back—back to Paris, won’t he, St. Denis? He’ll come back to—her? He’ll make her leave the husband whom she—does n’t love? They’ll be happy together after a time, won’t they, —Monsieur? See, I’m glad, glad! I would have him happy — Oh, but not too happy — Yes, yes, I’d have him come back to her!”

“Hélas, Colette!” said I. “He’ll never come back to her, nor to any of us who love him! We sha’n’t see him again, child. You’ll see him before we will—if one may believe the books. I will write him all you’ve said, dear girl, but I sha’n’t see him again, *ici bas*.”

She turned her head upon the pillow so that her great eyes burnt into mine, and there was a little wondering glad smile at her lips.

"He—means to—die down there?" she whispered, "to die, Monsieur? He—won't come back to the other woman, the tall, proud one? Ah if—I might meet him, là haut!—Monsieur, Monsieur, you've made me so glad to go, so glad!—If I might meet him!—Tell me, Monsieur, do you believe—do you think —? Ah, but you do n't know, do you? *Personne n'sait pas*—not even *le bon père Michel*!—He means to—die down there, to die as—as I'm dying?—Oh, I shall be waiting for him, moi! waiting, à l'autre coté!—How I loved him in those old days!—Monsieur, do you know what love is? It's a rose—with thorns. Roses die, Monsieur, in hands that are careless—and they're thrown away, withered—but sometimes—they live forever—if one shelters them and guards them, waters them with one's heart's blood, carries them in one's bosom. He never loved me, hélas! He only pitied me—I wonder—I wonder if he'll—love me—là haut?—Listen, M'sieur! Once he taught me, my St. Denis, a little song, a love song, *en Anglais*. I—I do not know what it means, the words—but I—sang it to him with my guitar. Will you write to him that—that I sang it once again, before—I went? Such a pretty little—*chanson*—all of—of love!" And smiling softly as she lay, one cheek upon the pillow, her great mass of black hair loosened from its braid

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and streaming to the floor, she closed her eyes and sang just over her breath,

“ ‘Ole mozzaire ’Ubbaird
She went to ze cubbaird
To fetch ’er poor dog abbone !’ ”

“Colette, Colette!” I cried, in an agony, hiding my face in the bedclothes. It was the most heart-breaking thing I ever heard. But she raised one white hand to hush me and sang on, just over a whisper, smiling tenderly, as one smiles in sleep.

“ ‘—But w’en she got zaire,
Ze cubbaird waz bare,
An’ so ze poor dog got—got—none !’ ”

And a most terrible spasm of coughing came again to rack her, so terrible that I thought she would never have done.

The door opened behind me and the young French-woman came in quickly.

“Ah, Monsieur!” she whispered, “you must go, you have stayed too long already!” She caught up a medicine glass from a stand near the bed, and forced some of the liquid between the girl’s lips, so that after a bit as I stood hesitating by the door, she grew quieter, and lay very still, gathering strength and breath.

“Just a moment more, Elise!” she whispered, “un petit instant!” And the young woman, with

a warning glance toward me, went out again and closed the door behind her.

"I must go, Colette," said I. "You're far too tired to talk. I'll come again, often. I must go now."

But she shook her head. "Too—late—M'sieur!" she whispered. Then after a moment,

"Monsieur would you—would you be willing—if St. Denis were here he would do it—would you——?" She held up her white frail arms a little, and there was an eager, wistful smile upon her lips. I knew what she would ask.

"Ah, child!" I cried, "dear child! try to think I'm St. Denis! Shut your eyes and pretend I'm St. Denis, for he'd do as I'm doing." And I bent over the bed, kneeling beside it, and slipped my arms under her, raising her so that I held her close to me. And I kissed her lips twice.

When I looked back from the door she lay quite still with the same tender smile upon her lips as when she had sung the "little chanson, all of love."

"I will come back to-morrow, early," I said, outside, to the young woman.

But that night they sent me word that she had gone, à l'autre coté, very suddenly, and quite without pain—singing.

CHAPTER XXIV

I CAME in from poor little Colette's funeral, sad and tired, for I had walked, hat in hand, among the chief mourners, all the long way to the cemetery. At the loge by the iron gate the concierge told me that M. le Colonel waited for me in the studio.

When I entered I thought at first that he must have wearied of waiting and gone away. Then, after a moment, I saw him sitting by Denis's writing-table, over in the shadows, at the far side of the room. His head was in his arms upon the table, and he was quite still.

"Von Altdorf!" said I, "von Altdorf!" but he did not stir. Then I went across the room and touched him upon the arm.

Colonel von Altdorf raised a face that I did not know.

"Why—why, man, what's happened?" I cried in alarm. "What are you looking that way for? What is it, I say?" Then my eye caught a crumpled bit of paper between his fists, a dispatch.

"You've news?" I demanded, "bad news? from Novodnia? from the Prince?"

"There is no Novodnia," said Colonel von Alt-

dorf in a dull tired voice, "and there's no prince, either."

I think I stared at him for quite a minute. Then I went over to the little cupboard in the wall and took out a flask.

"Here!" said I soothingly, "you drink a bit of this, and then we'll talk it over. You're a bit feverish. You don't know what you're saying."

But von Altdorf pushed away the flask.

"Would you—like to see it?" he asked, still in the strange dull tone, and offered me the crumpled telegram. It was a senseless jumble of words, and I threw it back to him impatiently.

"I can't read that, man!" said I, "write it out, or else, for heaven's sake, tell me what it says. If anything has happened, tell me! Wake up!"

Colonel von Altdorf settled back in his chair with a little sigh, and twisted the sheets of paper idly between his fingers. He seemed in a kind of stupor quite beyond any feeling.

"This," said he with no emotion or seeming interest in his tone, "this tells of things that must have happened two days ago. It was sent, not from—from Novodni, but Belgrade, by one of—Czerowitz's men. Czerowitz is dead. The Prince is—dead ——"

"Great God!" I cried in a gasping whisper. "Dead? dead? the Prince?"

"Denis Mallory is dead," continued von Altdorf, as if he had not noticed the interruption.

"Georgias and his forces made an unexpected attack upon the capital after a night march. The garrison turned colour and joined them, even the Life Guards, all but a few. The Prince—the Prince was killed upon the steps of the Palace surrounded by a dozen officers and faithful men, Denis Mallory among them. It is certain that the Prince is dead and that Czerowitz and the Marshal are dead also. Denis Mallory fell across the body of the Prince whom he had been shielding. A young lieutenant of the Guards escaped and fled to Belgrade, from whence he sent the message to me, but—but not before he had learned that Georgias's movement had been inspired and in part directed and provisioned by—the White Throne, and that Novodnia is to be—to be wiped off the map—included within the Bulgarian boundaries. There is no more Novodnia. It's a Bulgarian province.—That—that is—all." And he sat silent once more, crumpling and smoothing the bits of paper between his hands, staring at the tapestried walls across the room.

I suppose it was quite half an hour before either of us spoke or moved. Then at last I rose, taking a long deep breath, and moved once or twice up and down the room. I laid a hand upon von Altdorf's shoulder, and shook him gently till he raised his head.

"Come!" said I. "Come! we must tell his—we must tell the Princess."

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"There is no princess," muttered von Altdorf.

"She must always be the Princess to us!" said I. "Come, man!" and he followed me quietly.

At the foot of the little ladder that had long since been set for our convenience at the studio window, we ran upon Sir Gavin MacKenzie. Von Altdorf stood by while I told him swiftly the terrible news which the dispatch had brought. I had never seen the gruff old Scotsman so overcome.

Then, after a moment, slowly and with drooping heads, we went up through the garden paths to where a gleam of white and yellow showed the Princess in her long steamer chair.

She must have seen us coming, for she rose, when we were still at some distance, and stood waiting, and the book that she had held in her hands dropped unnoticed to the ground. I think she suspected, from our faces and our bearing, something of what we would tell, for her own face went a little pale and her eyes grew wide and frightened.

So we came to where she waited, and stood before her, bowed and silent, dreading to speak the first word.

But the Princess put out a hand and touched me, looking into my face with those wide frightened eyes.

"Why—why gentlemen!" she faltered. "What is it?—What is it you would say? Colonel! Sir Gavin! —Why, Mr. Creighton! Tell me, please! It's—bad news of—of course—from—Novodnia? Tell me,

please, quickly! See, I'm quite, quite calm! I can—bear anything. Don't try to break it to me gently. Tell me at once. He is—he is—dead?"

"Oh, Madame!" said I, "the Novodnian hopes have been crushed utterly—beyond retrieving. There has been an attack upon—upon the Palace, and the Prince your husband—the Prince your husband is—dead."

"But *he*?" demanded the Princess Eleanor swiftly, her voice rising to a hoarse cry, "but *he*? What of *him*?" And then all at once she be-thought herself and shrank back, catching her hands to her mouth.

"Madame," said I, "the bravest gentleman and faithfulest friend in all the world is said to have died also, fighting to the last for the Prince, your husband."

Then I went on, gently as I might, to tell her all we knew of the tragedy that had swept so suddenly across the high hopes and brave plans of the gentlemen who fought for Novodnia's independence, but I do not think the Princess heard any word of it all. She had sunk back into her chair again and sat quite still, her hands covering her face.

Then after a long time, while we stood, silent and awkward, not daring to speak to her, powerless to utter any word of poor comfort, she looked up once more. Her face was perfectly calm, unnaturally calm, with no trace of emotion—as von Altdorf's had been.

"I thank you, gentlemen," said she, "for telling me—the truth with no hesitation, no foolish attempts to make it light. I—can say nothing just now. I must—have time to think. Will you leave me for a little?—Oh, Colonel von Altdorf, that Fate, of which you preach, has played her last card, has n't she?—I wonder—I wonder if she's laughing.—Ah, go, please, go!" And we left her there under the trees, the sweet, warm sunlight slanting through the leaves in golden splashes about her, the heavy perfume of flowers filling all the air, birds twittering cheerily from the branches overhead, and even—to complete the irony—a snatch of bright, gay music coming from a barrel organ in the street beyond the high wall. I remember the music, it was an air from "Mignon."

We went down through the garden to the studio, and—Colonel von Altdorf having, by this time, come quite to himself again—we talked till the day was gone of the terrible thing which had all in a moment wrecked our every plan and hope, and had cut the very ground from under our feet.

The chief problem was, of course, what was to become of the Princess Eleanor—for we still thought of and spoke of her as "the Princess," though she had no right to the title. To have called her anything else must have seemed a sort of unwarrantable liberty, an impertinence. The most natural event seemed to be that she should go back to her people in America, for there was now nothing to keep her

in Europe. The Prince was dead, his country was as if it had never existed as a body politic. She had no place here.

So at least it seemed to us, as we sat talking the matter over, and we agreed that after a little delay, when the horror and shock should have in some measure passed, we would put the thing to her judgment and advise her to return home.

Then after a bit we fell, most naturally, to talking of Denis Mallory, in hushed gentle voices, as of a great man gone to his last rest ; to reminding each other of all the things which had happened since that first evening at the Café d'Alençon, of his sayings and deeds, of what seemed to us the matchless nobility of the man, and of our bitter shame that we should so have misjudged, so have slighted him, at the first. We tried to picture that gallant fight on the steps of the palace where he had met his death. We tried to picture his bearing in the face of that certain disaster—the paltry dozen brave spirits grouped there on the steps high over a snarling mob. Gallant it must have been. Ah, there was no doubt of that ! smiling, probably. That would have been like him, smiling derisively down into the sea of faces while he drew his blade for its last grand play. Close beside his prince, aye, that's where he would have been, close beside or before him, covering his body with a marvellous swordsmanship that must have made those southern dogs gape and stare.

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And then, then when Karl, poor gentleman, was at last down, when Czerowitz was down and the old Marshal—for one felt that Denis would be the last—then, one pictured him, smiling still over a dozen wounds, that proud head high and defiant, one pictured him falling as a king of old time, magnificently, with none of the misery of defeat, grand in his very ruin.

So we talked together and wove our fancies and sang our valedictory to the man we loved, till the daylight faded to the dusk and dusk gloomed to night. And at last old MacKenzie and Colonel von Altdorf rose sighing and went to their homes.

“He was the best that the good God makes,” said old Sir Gavin gruffly. “We’ll no see another such in the world.”

“We all refused, once, to take his hand,” said von Altdorf. “We should pay well for that in the next world.”

“I’ve paid well for it in this one,” said I, and I took to my bed the heaviest heart that can burden a man’s breast.

CHAPTER XXV

WAITING again, waiting, for what we knew not, save that the habit of inaction seemed to have fastened upon us, leaving us idle while the days dragged interminably by. Perhaps it was the reaction from our time of stress and excitement, perhaps it was a sort of maze, a stupour following upon the sudden upsetting, in so tragic a manner, our carefully laid plans and confident expectations. I know that we all went about dully, taking little interest in what we did, and that the future seemed hung with a curtain which we dared not, or lacked the energy to, pull aside.

We spoke to the Princess Eleanor of our discussion relative to her prospective movements, and urged her return to America where she might, among her old friends and associations, the sooner rid herself of the pall of tragedy and ill fortune which had so weighed her down, but the Princess, like us all, seemed strangely apathetic and unwilling to bestir herself. She put us off with promises to think of the matter soon, to wait till she was fully rested, that she was not yet prepared to move.

Meanwhile I met her often, as before, in the garden, and we talked together of the past, and of the fuller news that came to Colonel von Altdorf

day by day in dispatches or letters, bearing upon the conditions in what had been Novodnia.

The late Prince, we learned, had been quietly interred among his fathers in the great cathedral at Novodni. This was done partly by orders from the White Throne, partly because the Novodnians, sobered after their debauch of rioting and bloodshed, desired that their late ruler should rest befittingly and in dignity.

Of Denis Mallory we learned nothing more. The disturbed conditions in the capital made any careful investigation impossible. Indeed all our news came piecemeal from Belgrade whither the few faithful souls left alive had fled for safety. It seemed that he must have been buried along with the other victims of that cowardly attack in some unmarked grave which no one might, later, be able to point out. Ah well, it was a soldier's grave, dignified by what rested within it. It was such as he would have chosen, I think. His monument lay in a few hearts and memories. I fancy we all envied him a little.

As for the puppet leader of the uprising, the tool of an ill-concealed hand, he was, so we learned, in Moscow, ostensibly in consultation with the force that had raised and directed him, actually a prisoner, held in safe view till all danger from him should be at an end, till Novodnia should be securely established as a nameless province of her greater sister state.

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Of all these matters we talked at length, the Princess Eleanor and I, sitting or walking in the old garden, but still the Princess would speak no word of Denis Mallory, only listened with averted face when I talked of him, save that one day—it was when we learned, through dispatches to Colonel von Altdorf, that nothing more was known of him, that he must have been obscurely buried with the others; and I brought her this news, blurting it out baldly with no comment—she looked up at me for an instant and her lips quivered.

“Now God rest his soul, Mr. Creighton,” said she. “God give him in the next world what he never found in this, peace and happiness!”

“I think he found a certain happiness, Madame,” said I, sadly. “It was in serving you, making sacrifices for you, fighting for you. Peace of soul he might not find. Aye, God grant it to him where he is now! Still I think he found happiness—all he dared hope for.”

“God rest his soul,” said the Princess Eleanor again very low.

It was upon one of these days when we sat under the great trees where the Princess’ chair was placed each morning for her—she would never sit upon the old stone bench, nor, if she could help it, pass near it—that we saw, coming down one of the paths from the house, Colonel von Altdorf and Miss Jessica Mannering. Miss Mannering appeared to be much absorbed in the splendours of a very

handsome ring set with a sapphire between two diamonds. This ring encircled the third finger of her left hand, and Miss Mannering held the hand out before her at various angles, watching, with little murmurs of delight, the flashes evoked from the stones by the sunlight that filtered through the leaves high overhead. The murmurs of delight she occasionally varied by little snatches of song—of a sentimental character—and honestly compels me to add that her right hand rested confidently upon the manly shoulder of Colonel von Altdorf, whose smile-wreathed countenance presented that picture of utter imbecility commonly portrayed by middle-aged men in like circumstances.

They did not see us until they had come very near, then a smothered laugh from the Princess Eleanor brought them suddenly and cruelly to the bitter realities of life. Miss Jessica Mannering gave a little cry of dismay, and the hand that had rested upon Colonel von Altdorf's shoulder was withdrawn with some haste, while the other one, the one bearing the very handsome ring upon its third finger, sought a prompt retreat behind her back. As for Colonel von Altdorf, his expansive smile froze swiftly into a look of the most alarming horror.

But the Princess went up to her cousin and took her into her arms, laughing still, and kissed her a great many times, and cried :

“You silly little goose! did you suppose we

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hadn't known all about it for weeks? People in your state of mind always seem to think every one else is blind and deaf—— Oh, Jess, Jess darling, you must be so happy! It's only insulting of me to hope you'll always be so!" And being women, with women's strange ways, they wept a little upon each other's shoulders—by way of exhibiting their pleasure—while I was pumping at von Altdorf's arms, and demanding how he had ever dared to do it.

But after the lovers had gone away, with their smiles and their glad eyes, down among the trees and shrubs, the Princess Eleanor sat for a long time with her hands over her face, and her lips quivered a little when she bade me adieu. Poor lady! her desolate plight must have come in upon her most sorely when she saw the happy love light in other eyes.

As for me, back once more in the studio, I stood staring helplessly at the table where the afternoon mail lay spread, and rubbed my eyes and stared again, thinking I must be a little mad, and took a turn up and down the room frowning fiercely at the strange trick that my eyes were playing me. For this letter, in the grey square envelope with a Servian stamp, would seem to be addressed in a queer, sprawling, unlovely hand that I knew as I knew my own. Of course, said I, nervously, it was only a trick that my eyes played me. The thing was manifestly impossible, yet—I forced myself

out of the fit of mingled fear and dread and—something else. I called a semblance of steadiness to shaking hands, and tore open the square grey envelope. I took one look at the letter's heading, and then I dropped into a chair that stood by the table and laid my head down upon my arms and fell to sobbing like any woman.

But this is what I read, when after a little, I had pulled myself together, and was able to hold the written sheets before my eyes.

“BELGRADE, June the fifth.

“DEAR OLD LAD :

“Did it make you jump to see my ugly scrawl again? Faith, it's uglier than ever, just now, for I'm not very strong yet. But you'll not mind if my pen does prance all over the page, as it has a queer way of doing—all on its own responsibility. You'll have had me under the sod long since, won't you, lad, you and von Altdorf and old MacKenzie? But you can't lose a bad penny. It always turns up. And so I've turned up, much the worse for wear, Ted, but on my feet again, thanks to some good people here who took me in when I was little else but fragments of a man held together by my clothes, and managed somehow to stitch the fragments together.

“You'll have heard all that I'd tell you of what happened a month since, how those cursed dogs did for the Prince—God rest his soul!—and how Novodnia is Novodnia no more—and well served, too, for breeding such swine!

“Ah, but there's one thing I can tell that may be news to you, Teddy lad. Our old friend von

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Steinbrücke turned up here—I would say there, in Novodni—and took another hand in things. So you did n't finish him after all, though, by my faith, you left him a remembrance! The man wore a great bandage about his neck to the moment he died—for he did die at the last, but that comes later—and they said your point must have cut his palate or the root of his tongue, for he could n't talk, only made queer beast noises. Oh, yes, Steinbrücke paid up!

“But ah, Teddy, Teddy, when I fall to thinking of those curs of Novodnians and of what they did, I see scarlet. I've fought, as you know, in many queer corners of the earth, and I've seen my share of blood and cruelty. I've seen those Latin Americans mob a president whom they did n't fancy—but he generally deserved it. I've seen Chinese drag a foreigner out of his house and tear him to bits—but they thought they had reasons. He was an enemy. What I'd never seen before was a man's own friends desert him, go over to the enemy, shoot him, stone him, not because they'd anything against him, but because it was plain that the enemy must win, anyhow, and they wanted to be on the safe side. Sheer cowardice, Ted, but such contemptible cowardice!

“Aye, they outwitted us, George and his crowd, though they did it through the treachery of our own men. They made a forced march one night, and in the morning they were in Novodni. The garrison had surrendered with never a shot fired! They came swarming and hooting about the Palace, soldiers and civilians, men, women and children, calling for the Prince, and oh, lad, lad, the Life Guards ran out of their barracks, down by the Palace gate, and joined them! The Life Guards! Why Prince Karl knew personally every man in the

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regiment, helped them out of their little scrapes, gave them wedding presents, stood godfather for their brats! Ah, that was the bitterest part of it all! We knew the thing was all over, then, but the Prince would go out on the steps of the Palace and try to speak, and we went with him, a dozen of us.—You know what happened. The mob came up at us, a great wave of them and we lasted only a few moments. The Prince wouldn't lift a hand. He had no weapon, but stood there, bareheaded, hands clasped before him, till a bullet from below finished him. Thank God, he died before they got their hands upon him, for we had been holding them off with our pistols and swords till they finally trampled us under. And here's where von Steinbrücke comes in. He was at the very head of the mob as it came up the steps. Gad, he was fairly frothing at the mouth to get revenge for that bandaged neck of his. Some one else engaged him first, and I saw no more of him for a few seconds, for I was, as you may say, busy. But directly, he whirled about, just before me, with a sort of snarl, and made at the Prince.—Oh well, I won't dwell on it. I finished your work, Ted, and then somebody caught me a knock over the crown, and I dropped upon the Prince's body. He'd been alone for while I spitted von Steinbrücke.

"Well, they looted the Palace and finally went away—to burn some public buildings I believe—leaving the little heap of us lying on the steps. It seems that some well-meaning but not over-brave souls picked us up, and finding one or two not quite done for, shipped us off to Belgrade along with several train loads of refugees, the decenter sort who wouldn't stay in the capital to see it burnt and looted.

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"So here I am, old lad, whole again—though precious flimsy—a plank from the wreck, and feeling mighty little of a hero. For I'm the chap who would have set Her and her husband firm on their throne, and then made an end of myself. But her husband's dead and the throne no longer stands. So I've failed all around.

"Does von Altdorf still talk of his Fate? What a hand she played, Teddy boy!—I've come into a fortune, lad—and there's a bit of irony for you!—It seems that my old Uncle John, who hated me as he hated nothing else in all the world, the devil included, got rolled out in the hunting-field about the time that I was so nearly done for, and, leaving no will, his property comes down to me as next of kin. The solicitors appear to have seen my name in the papers as being in this row down here, and so wrote to me at Novodni, the letter coming on to Belgrade. Ah well, the saints give him peace!—meaning thereby a good horse, a pack of hounds and plenty of celestial foxes, with right of way through the Elysian fields. But for one thing, lad, I'd settle down now, on the old gentleman's money, and quit this vagabond soldiering. But the one thing is the only thing, Teddy, so no quiet life for me. I've a certain duty left to perform, a trust. Then, when that's over with, off for more fighting! Better luck this time, maybe. There's good work forward in the Transvaal, and the Cape Mounted Police know me of old.—They've jolly good reason to—— They'll give me a billet right enough. But first for my trust. I must come on to Paris and give the Princess Eleanor the last news of her husband. I've certain little things to place in her hands, keepsakes, a lock of hair, a ring or two, a locket the Prince gave into my care when he knew

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that he must die, and begged me to give to her, should I by any chance come through the affair alive.

"So I shall see you again, after all, dear lad. Ah, it will be good to have a grip at your hand once more! And at von Altdorf's and Sir Gavin's! I shall be there not long after you get this, a day or two, maybe. Tell them I'm coming and be looking out for me.

"Till then, lad,

"Faithfully,

"DENIS MALLORY."

I do not know how many times I read this, and read it over again, sitting there by his old writing-table in the studio. I know that my heart was pounding at something like twice its normal speed, that I wanted to sing and dance about the place, to rush out into the street and shout aloud to every one that Denis was n't dead at all, but alive—alive and almost well, that we were going to see him, hear his dear old voice again, watch his whimsical little smile, feel his good hand-grip! Oh, I had quite an exciting little time, all by myself, there in the studio.

Then suddenly I thought of something, and made a dash for the window that gave upon the garden. I vaulted the bar, in scorn of such trifles as ladders, and ran up through the trees. Yes, she was still there. I saw the white gleam of her gown through the shrubbery.

Poor lady! she must have thought me mad—as indeed, I very nearly was—for I burst upon her,

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breathless, and, I doubt not, capering, and waved the crumpled sheets of the letter over my head.

"He's not dead, Madame!" I cried. "He's not dead at all! Do you hear? He's alive! He is coming to Paris—— They nearly did for him, but he lived through it. I tell you he's *alive*!"

The Princess did not cry out nor turn pale nor make any show of excitement, only her eyes, when after a moment she understood what I would say, went slowly very wide with a certain eager brightness, and she held out a hand that shook a little, for the letter.

But I, dropping the letter into her lap, rushed madly on up to the house, in hope of finding Sir Gavin there, or perhaps von Altdorf or Miss Manering, for I wanted every one to know the wonderful news. I wanted to see their faces when they heard for the first time that the man we loved was still alive.

CHAPTER XXVI

IT was two days later, and I sat in the studio trying to write letters which should have been written months since, but my pen had a trick of hanging idle over the page till the ink dried upon it, or of trailing off in the middle of a word, into an illegible scrawl, while my eyes stared, unseeing, beyond the table and the studio walls, and an errant fancy wandered over the map of Europe between Paris and far off Belgrade.

Where would he be now? Had he left Belgrade? Was he sitting behind a *Neue Freie Presse* in the Orient Express, counting the hours to Paris? Why the devil did n't he telegraph or something?

So the letters made but poor progress, and at last I threw down my pen in disgust, and fell to pacing the room like a tiger in its cage.

"I'll go over to the house," said I at last. "They may have heard something since I saw them this morning." I let myself out of the window and went up through the garden.

But, half way to the house, a hurrying servant ran me down. M. Mallory had arrived. M. le Colonel said to come at once! And I gave a great shout of delight and broke into a run.

Near the house I met the Princess Eleanor who

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was coming out. She was a bit flushed as to the cheeks, a bit bright as to the eyes.

"Will you ——" she said, "will you tell Mr.—Mallory that when he wishes to—to deliver his messages to me, I shall be in the garden?"

"Why, yes!" I cried. "Yes, gladly!—Ah, be kind to him, Princess, he's done much for your sake!—Where shall I say that you will be? Where in the garden?"

"Say that I shall be at the old stone bench," said the Princess Eleanor, moving past me with her head turned away. And I ran on.

Under the porch of the refectory, I paused an instant. The doors beyond were open to the sweet summer air, and through them there came the hum of conversation in many voices, but presently, over the chorus of questions, of little cries and exclamations, his good old laugh! strong and deep and cheery as ever. Lord, how it made my heart jump!

He was standing in the centre of the music-room, Sir Gavin and von Altdorf and Miss Jessica Manering pressing close about him, and half a dozen servants hovering near.

The past month had left its marks upon him, for he was very pale and thin and hollow-eyed, and he bore across the left cheek bone a long scar as from a sabre cut.

He heard my step at the door and turned about.

"It's Teddy!" he cried, and came over to me

swiftly, and caught me about the shoulders, shaking me back and forth.

"Why, lad, lad!" said he, "dear old lad!" and seized upon my two hands, nearly crushing them in his grip. Upon my word, he had strength left in him for all his white, thin cheeks!

"She's waiting for you in the garden, Denis," I whispered, "at the old stone bench." And then, directly, I was almost sorry I had spoken, for all the bright, cheery gladness left his face quite suddenly, and it took on that old look of pain and hopelessness that I had grown to know so well before he went away.

"Why yes, lad," said he, "yes, I must go, must n't I?"

He turned about to the others talking and laughing in a little group.

"I must bear my message to the Princess, if you'll all excuse me for a bit," he said. "I shall be back in half an hour." And he left the room with a slow, lingering step as if he dreaded what was before him.

He went out under the old Gothic porch, out into the cool green shade of the garden, where flecks of yellow sunshine wavered about his feet, as the leaves above stirred in the wind, where the early roses filled all the air with scent, and birds hopped along the margin of the gravel paths hunting for worms.

He went down under the prim acacias, down the

centre path toward the fountain, and at its left, where stood the old stone bench, he saw a glimmer of something white. Then in a moment he stood before her, head bent.

The Princess Eleanor gave a little low cry when she saw his pallor and his thin face and the scar across one cheek bone, and she put out a hand to him timidly. But Denis was bowing and did not see.

"Will you not sit down, sir?" she begged, and pulled her skirt aside to make room for him. "You are not yet strong enough to stand long."

"Why—no, Madame," he began, "I—I am quite strong I assure you — Still—since you are so good — Yes, I will sit down for a moment. I have something to give to you and something to tell you of—of the Prince's death."

"You—fought beside him, they tell me," said the Princess Eleanor with lowered eyes.

"Aye, Madame," said he, "I stood beside him, sheltering him as best I might, till he died."

"He died nobly," murmured the Princess with a little sigh.

"He died, Madame," said Denis Mallory, "he died a hero and a martyr, for when he went out upon the Palace steps he knew that he went to certain death. Yet he would go in spite of us all who sought to save him. He went unarmed, and stood there, facing those dogs with no word or gesture, till the bullet came. But before he went, he spoke

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to me of—you, begged me to come to you if I should escape, to tell you that he died as you would have him die, and that his last thought was of you. When I begged him to live for your sake, to escape as he might have done, he only shook his head.

“‘She’d despise me if I should do such a cowardly thing,’ he said. ‘She never loved me, let me win her honour and respect by dying like a man.’ And he gave me certain little things that he kept by him always, certain trinkets, keepsakes, begging me to give them into your own hands. I—I made a little packet of them. Here it is.”

He reached his hand into an inner pocket and drew out a small box, wrapped with paper, which he gave to the Princess. Something else that had been in the pocket slipped out at the same time, and fell to the ground. It seemed to be a little knot of ribbons, pink, but covered by an ugly brown stain.

The Princess Eleanor laid the packet, unopened, upon her lap but her eyes followed the knot of ribbons, which Denis Mallory, flushing a bit, had quickly picked up from the ground and put away again in his pocket.

“Why that—what is—what is that?” she cried in a very low tone.

“A mere trifle, Madame,” said he, not meeting her eyes, “of—no value—save to me.”

“Will you let me see it, sir?” asked the Princess Eleanor humbly.

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He hesitated a moment, flushing again, but the Princess held out her hand, and after a little he laid the knot of ribbons in it.

"A knot of pink ribbons?" said the Princess Eleanor. "Only a knot of pink ribbons? It is a poor thing to value, sir, yet you say that it is of value to you. Why you have cared for your treasure but indifferently! See, it is all stained."

"They are honourable stains, Madame," said Denis Mallory coldly. "I am not ashamed of them." But the Princess gave a sudden cry and dropped the knot of ribbons from her hand. Then she caught it up again, as quickly, and looked up at him wide eyed.

"You—you mean," she faltered, "they're blood-stains? *Your* blood?"

"It can be of no interest to you, Madame," said he. "I am sorry that the thing dropped from my pocket—— Will you give me my knot of ribbons?"

He took the bit of stained silk from her hands, and rose to his feet, bowing.

"And now, Madame," said he, "I have performed my last service, since I have fulfilled my trust. I will intrude upon you no longer. I beg your permission to go."

"Ah no—no!" she cried, turning a little pale. "But no! you—you must not go, yet. There is much that I would ask you of—of the Prince! Must I beg you to remain?"

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"Why, Madame," said he, "I am altogether at your service. I shall be more than glad to tell you all I know of—the Prince's death. I—I feared I was—unwelcome when once my mission was fulfilled. What is it you would know?"

The Princess Eleanor leaned forward a little so that her face was hidden. She seemed not quite at her ease, not quite certain as to her words.

"Tell me," said she, "of—of yourself, sir. You speak altogether of the Prince, poor gentleman, and of his death. You say no word of yourself. What are you going to do now that the war is over in Novodnia?—Mr. Creighton tells me that you were used to writing for the press. Will you go back to literary labour?"

"Why as for that, Madame," said Denis Mallory, "I wrote to keep body and soul together when there was no fighting to be done, but the death of an old uncle has put me beyond want. I go from here to South Africa where there is war. I shall find occupation there."

"But your—friends," said the Princess, "Mr. Creighton and Colonel von Altdorf and all? Surely they have some claim upon you! Surely they will not let you leave them again so soon, now that you may live where you will, and as you will."

"My friends, Madame," said he, "will never attempt to hold me here, for they know why I must go. I have a thing to do which, in Novodnia, I

failed in doing—along with my other greater failure.”

The Princess shivered a little for she knew what the thing was.

“And there is nothing then, which could alter your determination?” she asked presently. “Nothing which would keep you in Paris?”

“But one thing, Madame,” said he, “and that one thing I may never hope for.”

“Never?” she murmured, her head still bent away from him. “You used not always to be of so hopeless a mind, sir.”

Now Denis was holding himself too hard in hand, setting too fierce a curb upon speech and eye, to realise that the Princess Eleanor’s manner toward him was far different from her attitude at their last meeting. If it occurred to him at all, he doubtless thought it a mere natural graciousness, such as a woman so queenly must use toward the meanest thing that approaches her. Still, I think that her softened voice, her lack of outward scorn and contempt, gave him a certain shred of courage.

He rose to his feet and moved over to the old fountain, where he stood some time with his back to the Princess, frowning down upon the bubbling water, clasping and unclasping his hands, and stirring the green mold with a thoughtful foot.

Then all at once he drew a long breath, as of decision, and turned again toward the Princess.

“Madame,” said he, “I have something to ask of

you, to beg of you before I leave Paris, never to return. It may be that you cannot or will not grant it, and, if so—why my asking will have been only one more presumption, one more impertinence. When we—when I saw you last, here in the garden, I told you that I should ask nothing of you, not forgiveness, not pity, but when, weeks ago, I lay between life and death, and did not know if I should see another day dawn, it came to me that I could die in peace if only I had your forgiveness for the great wrong I had done you; not your pity, that were beyond reason to ask, just your forgiveness.

“When I left Paris with the Prince, it was in my mind to serve you by serving him, and so doing, to lose a life for which I had no love. But, as you know, Madame, I failed, for I did you no service, alas, and I am still alive. It seems that there rests no further service that I can attempt for you, and since my love for life has grown not at all, I go to Africa to lose it there. Have you such kindness in your heart, Princess, that you can give me forgiveness for the bitter wrongs I did you? Can you set me at peace?”

The Princess Eleanor rose to her feet before him and looked into his eyes.

“Forgive you?” she cried in a little low shaking voice. “Oh, forgive you? It is I who should go upon my knees to ask your forgiveness, sir, for I think no man has ever served a woman so faithfully or at such cost, asking nothing at all in return.

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Forgive you? If I thought I could make you forget the terrible things I said to you, here in the garden, if I thought I could blot that whole dreadful scene utterly from your memory, I should be—why I should be almost happy! Oh, I have said things to you that no man could ever forget. You must be the one to forgive, sir, if you can forgive.”

He stared at her for a long time in a trembling silence, doubting his senses, refusing to believe that his ears heard aright.

“But—but, Madame, the great wrong I did you!” he whispered finally, “the contemptible trick I played upon you! the deception, the lying!”

“You did it for my own sake,” said the Princess Eleanor, “to save my life. You stooped to dishonour, if it was such, for me, as I was too mad to realise. Ah, I don’t know whether it was right or wrong! probably I shall never know, but I’m certain that it was noble and self-sacrificing and faithful, as is everything you have done. If I could not feel it at the time, why—I think I was a little mad, a little crazed by the horror of it all. A woman who sees her life in fragments about her feet, is not one to be kind and just. Ah, but I have had time in the last month to regret most bitterly all my ungratefulness and brutality and blind anger! I have had time to see things as they truly are, to realise that no woman was ever so faithfully or so unselfishly served in all the world.

“When I thought you were—you were dead, in

my service, and after what I had said to you, I—I wonder that I did n't die myself! Oh, Denis, Denis Mallory, must I go on? Must I say it all? Will you give me no help?" She sank back again upon the old stone bench covering her face with her hands, and her little ears burned crimson.

But Denis Mallory, on his knees before her, raised shaking hands to her own and drew them gently away. In his face there was a sort of pale wonder, a puzzled unbelief, but his eyes were wide and bright with the dawn of a certain great passion of joy.

"Yes," said the Princess Eleanor, looking bravely into his eyes. "Yes, I will tell the truth. I've—loved you all the time, every moment of the time! It was because I loved you so that I could be so bitter, so cruel to you." She paused, smiling—that smile that is close to tears—and fell to stroking his black hair, for he had laid his head upon her knees, face downward, and his shoulders heaved.

"Oh!" she cried in a hushed voice that trembled as she spoke. "If you were not the Prince nor I the Princess!"

His head came up in a flash and his arms went round her as he knelt before the seat.

"I'm not the Prince," said Denis Mallory, with his lips against a very small ear.

"Ah, no!" she cried, "not the Prince! only the King of all the world! Let me look into your Majesty's eyes to find the love there, and your Maj-

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esty's smile to see how bright the sun shines! Have you lost your tongue, Denis, my Denis Mallory?" demanded the Princess, "for this will never be you without a tongue! Can you not speak?"

"Words beggar love, my sweet," said he. "I'm tongue-tied, stunned with too much joy, made a little mad with a happiness that I had not dreamed of coming to me. Is it really I, my queen, holding your sweet hands here in Paradise? Is it really you who lay your cheek against my lips and look at me with love? Why, no, no! it can't be! It's one of those cursed fever dreams, and I'll wake soon with a most damnable pain in the shoulder and head, and be fed something from a bowl. Why, no! I'm one Denis Mallory, soldier of fortune, sometime tavern brawler and drunkard! This will never be real. It's a fever dream! I've had 'em before."

But the Princess Eleanor pulled him down upon the old stone bench beside her, laughing softly, and laid her head where—where there seemed a place made especially for it.

The sweet summer air stirred the leaves over their heads and quivered the splashes of sunshine that lay upon the green mold beneath. It brought up to them the scent of early roses and mignonette from the flower beds under the studio window. The old cracked fountain gurgled and laughed with its tiny stream; and from over the high street wall came the tooting of a tram faint and far away.

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"That Fate," said the Princess, stirring her head comfortably where—where it seemed to belong, "that Fate of which Colonel von Altdorf was wont to preach—I said the other day when—when I thought you were dead, heart's heart, that she'd played her last card, laughed her last laugh. I wronged her, didn't I? She was holding the last one."

"Two," said Denis Mallory. "The King and Queen."

THE LAST WORD

THEY were married within a fortnight.

“It may seem heartless and disrespectful to Karl, poor gentleman,” said the Princess Eleanor, “but I was never his wife in more than name. To mourn for him, to go in black, to pretend sorrow, would be but an insult to his memory. Let us take our happiness while we may. Heaven knows we have had little of such.”

So they were married.—It was a double wedding, for Colonel von Altdorf succeeded in persuading Miss Mannering that there was nothing unseemly in a little haste. Then they went away, von Altdorf and his bride to the Tyrol, where he has a place, I believe; but Denis and the Princess Eleanor quite to the other side of the world, to the heart of that strange brooding East where one may be altogether at rest and peace, may forget the hurry and bustle, the strain and stress, of this Western world of ours, may forget old pains and sorrows, heal ancient wounds and put away bitter memories.

They have a great estate, upon a certain island not unknown to travellers, where sweet airs blow always through gardens of strange, bright flowers, through groves of spice trees; where, standing

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upon a little hill, one may see the ocean with white sails and an occasional trail of smoke along the sky. And here they live, happy in each other's great love as few lovers may be happy. Here they are building their lives anew over the ashes of old sufferings; and for the world beyond they have never a sigh, never a wistful glance.

Still, I think they will some day return to us, in their own good time, when they are quite ready. I cannot think that they mean to bury themselves for a lifetime. Denis is too strong and keen, too natural a leader of men, to sit long idle, and she is too noble and beautiful a soul, too splendid a woman to hide herself forever from the world where she might take so high a place.

So I wait, hearing from them at intervals, hoping always that they may emerge from their island Paradise, to see their faces again, hold their hands, feast my eyes once more upon the loveliest woman I have ever seen, and feel the grip, hear the cheery voice, of the bravest and truest gentleman in all God's great world.

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